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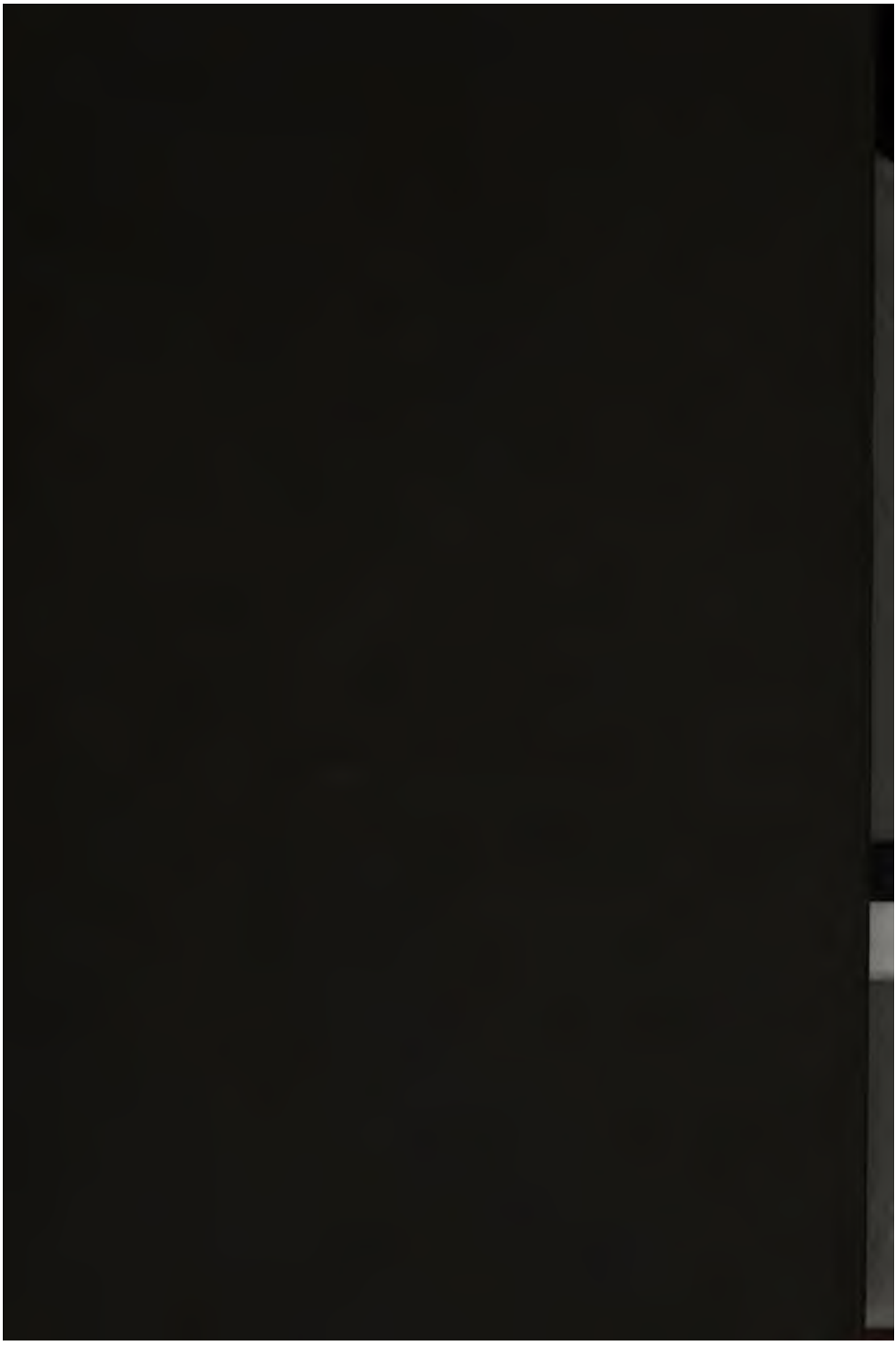


MERVYN O'CONNOR

AND

OTHER TALES.

VOL. II.

MERVYN O'CONNOR

AND

OTHER TALES

BY

THE EARL OF DESART

AUTHOR OF

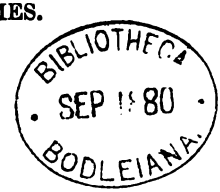
"THE HONOURABLE ELLA,"

"KELVERDALE,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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MERVYN O'CONNOR.

(CONTINUED.)

MERVYN O'CONNOR.

CHAPTER XVIII.

QUEREAL.

IT must not be supposed that the change of scene and other influences of my altered life in any way deadened the feeling of despair which had come upon me when I saw Lady Monymusk for the last time. She was still always in my thoughts; she appeared to me waking and sleeping, still with all her wondrous charm of beauty and expression, still as the power that coloured every action of my life, but with a pain

added that entirely destroyed those pleasures of youthful imagination and chivalrous sacrifice which had been in my mind associated with her image.

I believe that if I had been at her bedside and seen her die, believing her to care nothing for anyone save her husband, I should have been happy—that is, comparatively speaking. I never argued the matter out logically with myself; but of course now I know that much of my anguish—which I believed to be wholly caused by her descent from the pedestal of virtue on which I had mentally placed her—was in reality caused by the fact that she had left that pedestal in company with some one who was not I.

Another's love for oneself is always excusable. The man must be possessed of a rare and not agreeable cynicism who could blame a woman for sacrificing all for his sake: although, indeed, there is a well-known French novel in which the Don Juan turns fiercely on the lady and re-

proaches her with having betrayed *his* friend, *her* husband!

Englishmen, however, do not often rise to this height of introspective—or retrospective—morality; and are much inclined to pardon a sin when they reap the benefits thereof and do not share in the punishment therefrom.

This is an easy-managed tolerance, and adds to the pleasure which exists in sin.

I could have forgiven my divinity, my adored Gertrude, anything she might have done—for me. Had she put a little prussic acid into his Lordship's tea; had she even written anonymous abuse of him in a weekly paper; I could have loved her all the more if these acts had been performed for my sake. But when it came to poor Lord Monymusk's being deceived, betrayed, &c., &c., for another, for Colonel Bayley North, the thing became too horrible for words, and I could only—as I inwardly expressed it in those miserable days—eat

out my heart in a vain regret that one so fair should be so horribly false. Doubly false, too; for had she not deceived me, who had believed her to be an angel, and who had so heroically stifled my love for her lest it should offend those delicate instincts of virtue I had endowed her with?

You may admire a woman for repulsing everyone, yourself included, but you must hate her if she repulses you and does not repulse everyone else.

She who will sin for you is impelled by inexorable destiny; but that destiny has nothing to do with her proceedings as regards any other young man.

* * * * * *

The difficulty I experienced during my first month at Quereal in preventing myself from writing to her impassioned letters of reproach, entreaty, love—all mingled as they were mingled in my heart—was immense. Twenty times did I sit down—generally after mess, when the twenty-four shilling

moselle had been flowing freely—to write in my heart's blood on the subject; and twenty times did I, the morning after, tear up the letter, blotted not only with ink, but also with tears, and smelling so strongly of tobacco smoke.

To forget her—to cure myself of what appeared to be a morbid hankering after an impossibility (for granted that I could win her love, it would not be now the love of the unstained lady to whom I had given my calf adoration)—I went largely throughout that winter into such society as Quereal afforded. I started a sleigh, with two ponies and lovely robes of white fox fur, trimmed with the colours adopted by my regiment for cricket and other purposes—green, yellow, and drab. I became a proficient at the Albert Rink in the outside edge backwards, the Dutch roll, the figure of eight, and all the other intricacies of skating. I chose a "muffin," and adhered to her with a perseverance which augured well for my

eventual matrimonial tractability, and I actually—when the said muffin happened not to be there—cast aside all my melancholy and hermit-like airs at an occasional ball, and flirted in a style impossible out of the Dominion.

Oh, those Canadian feet! Whether they have benefited by that distance that lends enchantment to the view, whether the lapse of time has lessened their size or added a fresh grace to their form in my memory, I know not. But I do know that even now the memory of some of them as they twinkled over the floor of St. Barnabas Hall mess-room, or showed their little tips as they emerged from a sleigh at the conclusion of a "club drive," makes me feel as if—in short, as if I were twenty-one again.

They could take care of themselves, the owners of these tiny feet, and knew perfectly well the exact line which separates flirtation jocose from flirtation serious, with consequence and responsibilities.

A look or a tone might overstep this boundary, and I remember at a ball one night when something—a particular valse, I fancy—had made me think of Gertrude, that I repeated, for probably the tenth time, some inane compliment to my partner's beauty; but, Gertrude being in my mind, I did it so seriously, and with such a sentimentally melancholy expression, that, to my horrified surprise, the girl rose in evident perturbation, and said, "Papa will be back from his office to-morrow at six, and you can tell him. I presume we are engaged?"

After that I was very careful to keep up the orthodox grin while paying compliments to my partners; but nevertheless my absence of mind, not long after, caused me another embarrassment.

Tired of dancing, I had taken my partner into a quiet corner, and was engaged with her in the pleasant and harmless amusement of turning over the leaves of a photograph-

book and saying cutting things of the people therein portrayed.

Examining one picture more interesting than the rest, our faces came very close together. She was very pretty. I was very young. She seemed a careless, good-natured girl. I was possessed of a certain amount of audacity. The opportunity was perfect; at that moment we had the room to ourselves, and the view of it from the ball-room was blocked up by the presence in the door of the fattest man in my regiment.

"So pretty, isn't she, Sir Mervyn?" said she, with her lips not an inch from mine, and her fringe of soft hair on her forehead literally touching mine, while her eyes seemed to say, "Yes." So I kissed her.

She rose, with the dignity of five offended Queens rolled into one, and sailed from the room, after an exclamation of indignation.

Certainly I had only made her acquaintance that evening, but still—— Well, I came out of the sitting-room, and had the

satisfaction of seeing her talking eagerly, looking very pretty with the bright colour on her cheeks, to an elderly but uncommonly well-preserved gentleman, whom I ascertained to be her father. Other dances and other partners soon drove this little incident out of my head; and when I woke next morning, and with joy remembered that there was no parade, and that I could suit my hours of rising to my own laziness, I had utterly forgotten all about the kiss.

Suddenly there were given at my door those bangs which a soldier-servant believes to be delicate and refined raps, and which wake you in the morning with a confused idea that the end of the world has come, and that the angel Gabriel is hewing the wicked into pieces; and, simultaneously with that worthy domestic, entered the elderly gentleman of the night before. He made a slight bow, and from my bed, only half awake yet, I watched him while he slowly

removed his fur-coat and gloves, and then proceeded to lay upon my table a very formidable-looking hunting-crop.

"You are Sir Mervyn O'Connor?" he said at last, just as I was beginning to pinch myself to ascertain whether this were not some hideous dream out of which it would be a relief to awake and be horse-whipped.

I acknowledged my identity.

"And you insulted my daughter last night," he went on, in a matter-of-fact way, much as if these insults, followed by his matutinal revenge, were matters of every-day occurrence. "You kissed her on first acquaintance. Do you deny it?"

He glanced at his hunting-whip, and made a step towards the table on which it lay.

The situation was decidedly unpleasant.

"Mr. ——"

"Robinson."

"No, Mr. Robinson; I plead guilty."

"Ah!" He had hold of the infernal

whip by this time. I could scarcely help laughing at the absurdity of the thing, and yet, apart altogether from the chance of his getting the best of it, a fight with this irate papa would be most disagreeable; so I hurried on, while he stood over the bed—

"But I have some excuse. You must remember that Miss Robinson's beauty is of no common order. There is something so aristocratic——"

He interrupted me with much hauteur, but, I thought, with less determination in his tone—

"We are, sir, the elder branch of the Robinsons of Gloucestershire. You know them, of course?"

Prevarication here was absolutely necessary.

"Yes; I recognised the features at once—a splendid family—the Robinsons of Gloucestershire. Well—you see—I am scarcely accustomed to such beauty as that of your daughter; and it—coupled with the

lights—the music—the dancing—the champagne—the lobster salad—were too much for me. I apologise."

He looked at me doubtfully.

"This is the truth?"

"Of course. Won't you have a cocktail?"

The whip was put down. He shook me warmly by the hand, and in a few minutes we were hobnobbing together over a vile concoction of rye-whisky, bitters, and mashed-up ice.

Molly Robinson and I after this became great friends, and I even took her as my Muffin No. 2—the "understudy" of No. 1, as actors would say—and had many a pleasant flirtation with her as we drove home through the crisp moonlight, with the sleigh-bells jangling through the clear air. But I never kissed her again, not knowing whether the position would afford an excuse as good as that which had warded off her father's vengeance.

My legitimate muffin was a young lady familiarly known amongst us as "Taters"—why, nobody knew—who had been engaged so continuously to ensigns in the different regiments that succeeded each other at Quereal (indeed it was said that she forwarded her *carte-de-visite* to the Mess Committee of the in-coming regiment a week before they arrived so as not to break the current of *fiancée*-ism) that she almost ranked as a married woman.

She had a marvellous knowledge of the Army List, a good temper, an enormous appetite for sweet things—which I procured for her from New York—and a more or less amusing power of conversation. So our drives together were pleasant enough. One great advantage of my choice was that she had been muffin already to most of my brother officers at various times, and therefore by it I incurred none of the pains and penalties of jealousy. It was even rumoured that she had been engaged to our Colonel

himself, when he had visited Canada to put down a rebellion known to us only through our books of history. But this I am inclined to disbelieve, and rather give credit to the assertion that it was her elder sister who enjoyed this distinction; a charming lady, too, who had married a merchant in the city of Quereal, and who gave capital balls—capital at least in the way of amusement for those in search of the ludicrous, as her ball-room would hold sixty people and she asked two hundred, who all came.

* * * * * *

Somehow or other the long winter passed away; the snow melted, the river became navigable again, and that great event, the starting of the first steamer, took place. Sleighs and furs and skates were put away, and ineffectual attempts in the way of various kinds of long boots were made to keep out that slush of mud and melted snow which accompanies a Canadian thaw.

I said good-bye to my muffin with a sense of some relief; for we had exhausted our conversation, and had become very like a married couple in our impatience of stories and jests that we knew too well; and I had just made up my mind to spend my leave taking a look round the United States, when I received a letter from my mother announcing the death of poor dear old Gilbeau.

I was very fond of him, and heartily sorry —sorry for his death even after I had perused another which came a mail later telling me that he had left his whole fortune—after a few annuities to old servants &c., had been paid—to me.

I was a rich man again now, and the recollection of Gertrude Monymusk had sufficiently faded for me to wish once more to enjoy the sweets of London life. The officers of the 110th were capital fellows. Even Captain Poamer, the "beauty man," had, under a rigid course of chaff, shown

that he was possessed of very good qualities; but to me the delights of garrison life were only pale imitations of the amusements of the metropolis, and the conversation night after night at mess, full of joviality and good spirits as it was, had begun to pall upon me.

So I attended my last guest night, when oceans of moselle were quaffed in my honour; I served on my last court-martial, and for the last time I "told off" my company, reproved Private Atkins for the dirtiness of his belt, and pounced down upon Private Tomkins for jocular conduct in the ranks; and, about a year from my arrival in the country, I took ship at Montbec and sailed for the shores I had quitted so hopelessly ruined in heart and purse.

One passage in a letter I had received from Marx I read over two or three times:—

"I hear that Lord Monymusk has gone clean off his head with jealousy—of Bayley North, they say—and that the poor woman

—by Jove! how beautiful she is!—has a very hard time of it. You were hit hard there yourself, Jock, I remember."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN ENCOUNTER IN LAMBETH.

IT has been said that friends are like tobacco—you can buy them any day in the year, Sundays and holidays not excluded; and, in the limited sense in which all rough-and-ready sayings of this kind must be taken, it is true enough. A man with plenty of money can always, should he choose, be surrounded by many persons who outwardly act the part of friends. They will praise him to his face a good deal; and, perhaps, not for his own honour, but for their own justification, behind his back a little. They will fetch and carry for

him, and bear almost anything calmly except a suspicion as to the reality of his fortune. And, if not the real article, they will tend to make his life almost as agreeable as if they actually loved him for himself only.

No doubt one of the greatest luxuries which a rich man can buy is this friendship, or companionship, or outward sympathy, or whatever it may be called. Your popular poor man is sure to have many lonely hours —when his friends are engaged in other pursuits—which the rich unpopular man never need know. More especially will he find out the need of the circulating medium if he goes away for a time sufficiently long to let the grass grow over his memory; and the London soil is most suitable to this kind of growth. The fact is that in the hurry and bustle of social life in a large community a man cannot possibly be remembered for himself alone, or even for such small benefits to his fellow-men as can be done by

pleasantness and geniality. There must be some sterling contribution in the shape of dinners, or coach-drives, or other practical advantages connected with him to keep him in men's memories for many weeks after he has disappeared.

"Jack So-and-so has come back; he's been in America for two years," you hear at the Club; and the answer is, "Ah, yes; Jack—he was rather a nice chap, but careless; sure to go to the bad. What time shall we dine?"

"Mr. John Whatyecallit has come back—been living on his property in Cornwall these three years."

"By Jove! Come back, has he! Rather a stuck-up chap, proud of his money-bags. Where do you say he lives in town? I'll call upon him to-morrow."

I was astonished—overwhelmed—by the cordial welcome I received in London. True, I had only been away for a year, but that is a long time in "Society," and I

expected to share the fate of a brother officer who once told me that, on returning from a year's absence on duty in India, he was greeted by an old crony at the Rag with these disappointing words, "Hullo, old chap! Where have you been? I haven't seen you for the last few days!" My friend says that from that dreadful day he ceased to believe in human nature, or in friendship, or any other of the pretty fables of the nursery.

But in my case the news of my good fortune had preceded me. I was a *parti*—distinctly a *parti*—and not many days had I been in town before invitations came showering down upon me until my looking-glass could hold no more, and until I began to feel that I must indeed be a very pleasant person to be so universally required to grace dinners, parties, balls, breakfasts, and all manner of festivities. Colonel Gilbeau was far richer than we had given him credit for, having saved during his long stay at

Ballyconor; and the amount of ready money I found lying at my bankers fairly turned my head.

The very limited income I had drawn from the small and badly-farming tenants in Ireland after my brother's death was nothing to this. Now I had no bad season, no attempted reduction of rents, to fear. It was all hard solid money, to be used at my fair pleasure, and at hand in a moment at my beck and call.

It did not seem to myself that I was a whit cleverer or more agreeable than when I had departed, ruined, nine months before; but I must have been so, for now my lightest sayings were listened to with respectful attention, and my good stories, when I could remember any, caused perfect peals of laughter. Nay, my way of speaking must in some mysterious fashion have improved mightily, for I found ancient jokes which had missed fire with me scores

of times in the old days now awake perfect enthusiasm in my auditors.

And with this ready sympathy came confidence. I began to believe in myself. I walked with an assumed gait that in a poor man would assuredly have been termed swagger. I talked loud and interrupted other people; I laughed at my own jokes; I invented a new-shaped hat; I revolted successfully against many hitherto unchallenged but annoying petty ordinances of fashion and custom; to call me "Jock" became an honour for younger men; to have the *entrée* of the little Park Lane house (which I retained, and "did up" from cellar to attic in the perfection of bachelor style) was a thing to scheme for.

Had those forms of genteel advertising been invented then, I should have had my photograph in the shop windows, and have read weekly paragraphs concerning me in the organs of Society.

But Society in those days was smaller; perhaps it was a trifle more refined; and certainly it had then a certain knack, now entirely lost, of washing its dirty linen at home, and keeping its little scandals from the sight of the profane vulgar. People who have in the last few years become accustomed to hear the names of ladies with whom they asociate, and whose only crime is their beauty, shouted from cad to cad with coarse accompaniments of badinage in the street, can scarcely realise how short a time has elapsed since the idea of a lady's personal and private looks being actually commented upon in the Press would have set all Society in a glow of horror and indignation.

To say that I did not enjoy my season of vanity would be untrue; but it was not all quite as sweet as it might have been supposed. The suspicion of insincerity sometimes took away all the charm of the best-done flattery; the knowledge of human

nature which I had unconsciously acquired often prevented my shutting my eyes to the main cause of my success.

And one may have too much of even a good thing. When you have the world at your feet and are tempted to kick it, it rolls for you, in the direction you choose, truly; but the concussion hurts your foot nevertheless, for the world is the harder.

The worship of the mothers pleased, surprised, comforted, flattered, bored, and ended by alarming me. On the old mud-throwing principle, they threw such an amount of love at me that even I began to think some of it must perforce stick. They hunted me sometimes singly, sometimes in packs, trusting, I suppose, at the last worry each to be the one that got first bite. They woke me out of my first sleep—after, perhaps, a long night, beginning with a party, then a ball, then Cremorne and a cigar, and then another ball at Mr. Frère's—with little notes, carefully left overnight for the house-

maid to despatch the first thing next day by cab; notes praying me to lunch, imploring me to dine, conjuring me to dance, all of them requiring an immediate answer, which answer, should it be unfavourable, brought a swift revenge in the shape of another note, still more emphatic, which came, swift as fate, just as I was about to enter my tub.

Oh! how I longed for a law which should inhibit the sending of notes before noon! I have had four footmen at a time waiting in my hall, while I groaned upstairs over the paucity of excuses as yet invented for declining invitations.

When I remembered how very easily in old days I could evade an engagement by the concoction of a fictitious guard or orderly duty, I sometimes regretted the time of comparative insignificance.

Only once during that first season after my return did I see Gertrude Monymusk. I was strolling one fine evening home from Waterloo Station (having been down to a

water party, and having sent away my T-cart), when the idea seized me, as I had an hour before dressing-time, to penetrate some of the slums that lie about Lambeth, and to contrast my wealth with the poverty I should see. I was curious to observe the effect it would have upon me; for it sometimes amused me to make experiments upon myself, and one height of philosophy (and after all it is the real aim of all philosophy) I longed to attain to was the possession of the power of treating one's own troubles and pain with the same indifference, or equanimity of sorrow, with which one treats those of others.

The sights I saw were not very terrible. The women sitting at their doors working, or yelling to each other and to their muddy children, who were trying to render passing cabmen guilty of homicide in the street, certainly looked poor; but I saw no misery in their faces. There were, of course, marks of that anxiety which living from day

to day always leaves, and in their eyes gleamed the shrewdness of those who cannot afford to be cheated; but as I leisurely passed along in my *abandon* of wealth and pleasure, I could not see that I, although I was going to a good dinner that night, and had scores of good dinners in the future marked down on my engagement-book, was really one whit more contented than these people, who perhaps were sure of the bread and cheese for that night's supper, and of no more.

Somehow or other the reflection humiliated and annoyed me, and I was about to turn and retrace my steps towards Waterloo Bridge, when my attention was attracted to what appeared to be a miniature riot a little further down the street. Going towards it, I found that the excited group was composed of persons—women and a few men, of the neighbourhood, who were hurrying from their doors—surrounding a lady in

their midst. I knew she was a lady, although I could only catch sight of a bonnet; there was something in the way the bonnet was made, or put on, or carried, which was enough for me.

Not quite sure of the intentions of the crowd—which was rapidly acquiring a right to be called by that name—I hurried up and elbowed my way towards the centre of attraction; and then I knew that my services were at any rate not required to shield the wearer of the bonnet from danger.

So many blessings, so many kind words, poured upon one person in a short space of time I never before heard.

"She's an angel!" said one old woman.

"Angel!" scoffed another. "Better nor that. The angels stop up there and do nought; she comes here and sees us."

"All I can say," said a labouring man who was in the centre, "is that the doctor told me—jist as I tell you now—that there

isn't a nuss in his 'ospital who'd ha' nussed Emmy has she's done; so 'ere's three cheers for Mrs. Mayne!"

They cheered lustily; and a cabman, driving down the street, and stopped by the crowd, waved his hat out of sympathy and cheered too.

"Come, clear the street! I can't wait here all night. Go on, cabman," cried a harsh voice; and I turned round and saw that the occupant of the hansom was Lord Monymusk.

"Make way—the genelman's in a hurry!" said a rough-looking young gentleman, with broad shoulders, and the real Newgate curl over his ear, placing himself exactly in front of the cab-horse.

"Now then, move on—you mustn't stop the traffic!" said a portentous policeman, emerging a little guiltily from the public-house, and arranging his belt hurriedly, while the foam of the half-and-half still adhered to his lips.

Obedience to the law being the Englishman's distinguishing characteristic, the crowd melted away, and then, for the first time, I saw the lady who had been the cause of its gathering.

And Lord Monymusk also saw.

"Gertrude!" he shouted, springing out of the cab.

She shrank back as if alarmed, and instinctively I made a step towards them, for the man looked dangerous.

"You here again? Get in!"

He pointed to the cab, and, after a moment's hesitation, she obeyed.

"Turn round. Go to Hertford Street!" he shouted through the trap at the top of the cab, while the people about stood still, wondering.

"That'll be Mr. Mayne, I expect," said a man next to me. "'E don't look like a nice un at home. There's a licking in his eye."

"If he was to touch her," said the

man who had spoken of his Emmy, "I'd kill 'im, whoever 'e is. She is too good to be married—except to a Dook—she is."

I walked home, and for days I could not quite free myself from the remembrance of the despair on Lady Monymusk's face as she drove off by the side of her husband.

CHAPTER XX.

A REVELATION INTERRUPTED.

"SIR MERVYN O'CONNOR,

"My master, Mr. James, is very ill, and has asked for you. Can you come? He won't last long, and I think it would ease his mind to see you.

"Your faithful servant,

"HENRY EEDE."

This note was put into my hand one morning soon after my Lambeth experience, and of course I lost no time in going to Wandsworth. The old servant—who had written the letter—was a trifle less given to

suspicion than on my first visit, although I could see that he bore me no great good-will.

But what made me like the man was the trace of emotion on his rugged face; even now tears were glistening in his eyes.

"How is my uncle?"

"Very nigh gone—very nigh! And to think that after all he's——"

"He's what," I asked, as the old man lifted up his hands in horror.

"Let a woman in here!" He spoke much in the tone a Lady Superior might have used at seeing a male in her convent.

"Has he? Is she with him?" I asked, wondering whether I was about to see the *dénouement* of a romance.

"No; she went an hour ago. And now he's alone with the dogs. They know he's going."

"Alone with the dogs! And who is his doctor?"

"He won't have one—and he's main

right. A doctor can only tell you what's the matter with you, and I'd as lief die without knowing why—except that God wills it."

We were proceeding down the passage as he spoke, and as he stopped at a door, I was about to enter, when the old servant stopped me.

"Take care—you'll be eaten. The dogs are not in a good humour, I promise you."

He entered first, and all round the dim room I could hear subdued growlings, which at a word from the old man ceased, but were renewed as the animals became aware that he was not alone.

"Lie down—quiet, dogs—a friend! Mr. James."

"Yes," said a feeble voice from the bed. "Is that my nephew?"

"I have come, uncle. I hope——"

He stopped me.

"Bring a lamp; and, Mervyn, sit down there, where I can see you. Don't hope—

unless you hope for me to die without much pain. I am tired of pain; for I have borne so much—both of body and mind."

I sat down where he told me, and soon a dim lamp threw fantastic shadows over the strange scene. The handsome, white hollow-eyed old man lying on his bed of death—for even I could see that recovery must be impossible; the dogs all around, some sleeping, some walking about uneasily, and some watching him with anxious, affectionate, puzzled gaze; the mediæval appearance of the room, with its tapestry and old armour on the wall.

"Will you not see a doctor? I——"

"Doctor! No. They cannot cure fate; and why should I try to avert what I have prayed for for years? Mervyn, I have not sent for you to say farewell, or for any nonsense of that sort. We have only met once before, and I should despise you were you to tell me any lies as to your sorrow because I am dying. I don't want you to be

sorry. I am glad myself. But I like you —or what I have seen and heard of you— as much as I can like anyone now, and I want to——"

He ceased speaking, overcome by some sudden access of weakness or faintness. For a few minutes, which seemed to me centuries, there was a silence in the room, broken only by occasional movements of the dogs, who were all watching us intently, and by the ticking of the clock on the mantel-piece.

He lay back so quiet and still that I was becoming alarmed, when his eyes opened.

"Have I put it off too long? Oh! no. God would not be so cruel," he muttered; and then, turning his eyes on me, he said—

"Do you remember what I said to you the last time you came here?"

"Yes."

"How I told you that every one of our family had been overwhelmed by the curse —that woman's influence has pursued and wrecked the life of each one of us?"

"Perfectly. But, uncle, you are not strong now. Let me come again to-morrow and——"

"To-morrow I shall be dead. Now—now—if it be not already too late. Did you quite believe all I said to you? I, a dying man, demand the truth. Did you quite believe it, or did you think I had lived alone and brooded until facts were moulded to the family tradition I had made?"

"Perhaps—I did, a little."

"Of course. Well, she has been here, and I told her. We agreed that you had better know. You are in danger, or were. Gertrude Monymusk——"

"Is nothing to me now," I interrupted; "nothing."

"If that is so—— but yet—O God! give me only one more half hour of voice!—but yet—— look me in the face and say she is nothing to you."

Strange! a fortnight before I could have

done this most honestly; but that meeting in Lambeth, that sight of her pure face and sad eyes, had revived old feelings I had thought dead. I remained silent.

"As I thought. You have a rival?"

"Scarcely. Lady Monymusk is married, and——"

"Do not interrupt me. Listen! I told you that your father—my brother—died by his own hand. I proved that to you. But I did not tell you exactly why death was less bitter to him than life."

"You said that you both loved——"

"Yes, yes; but I did not tell you her name. The woman who deceived us both was—your mother."

"My mother! But surely—they became man and wife."

"She deceived me for him—in time, thank God! She broke my heart, but she left my honour intact. With him she ruined both. The morning of the day on which he killed himself he believed in her, loved

her, and was longing to go back to her and begin the new and happy life his change of fortune had made possible. On the evening of that day he held in his hand proof of her falsehood and of his own betrayal—betrayal not only by her, but by the man he had trusted above all others—and he was right to die. How could he go back and look upon the woman whom he loved and loathed at the same time; how could he go back to be greeted by the caresses of a son who was not his?"

"Which son was that?"

My voice sounded strange and hoarse, and one of the dogs gave a growl at—I suppose—its defiant sound.

"The younger. One moment more, and I have done. Mervyn O'Connor, it may be possible that the curse that hangs over us can be averted or die out. Your bright young life may be too strong for it, but you are in mighty danger. I have heard of this Gertrude Monymusk, and

when I contemplate your love for her the horrible possibility that rises before me is so—— Some water—quick—I am choking."

I gave him water, and he lay back on the pillow, with a long sigh.

"And the name of this man—who—O God!—my father! if this be true. His name!"

No answer came—the handsome features lay calm and still—the clock ticked—the dogs settled themselves to sleep. I rose, after repeating my question once more, and bent my head close to the pillow; he would tell me nothing else—he was dead.

* * * * * *

As I drove back to London that evening I caught sight of a face in a passing cab so like my mother's that, had I not known she was in Ireland, I could have sworn it belonged to her.

CHAPTER XXI.

MY MOTHER AND I.

MORE money! Fate seemed to have determined that, as my happiness diminished, my income should increase. My uncle James left me all he had, and, although his income was not a large one, several judicious purchases of land about London and his penurious habits combined to swell the amount of the balance he left behind him. But my affluence gave me no pleasure. It was embittered by the intelligence I had received from the dying man; I felt like an impostor, and every time that I heard myself addressed by my name I

shuddered. To doubt what he had said never occurred to me; you cannot doubt a dying man, and at any time it was almost impossible to doubt the word of James O'Connor. Old friends of his youth, who had utterly forgotten him in his retirement, revived their recollection of the handsome, dashing companion they had once envied and admired, and came to Manor Lodge to look again on his calm features, beautiful in death. Wandsworth was much excited by the funeral, and I was assured by the undertaker that it was a great success. My mother wrote a letter to me in answer to mine informing her of my uncle's death; but there was a constraint in it which I did not find it hard to understand. Nor did the closing sentence much perplex me.

"I suppose you saw him before he died; he was sure to send for you. Did he confide anything to you—of his life, or of the lives of others? He was subject to strange and painful hallucinations, as no doubt you

know. Probably as he neared his end these took more definite shape. I am not generally curious, but I beg you will humour me as to this, and write to me exactly what he told you, or come yourself. It is long since you have been at Ballyconor, and it is right for you to see your property and judge for yourself as to the stewardship over it you allow me to exercise. I feel, my dear boy, that in some things as regards you I have been wanting. Believe me, it has not been for want of affection. But, as you know, a great portion of my life ended with the life of your brother. We are prone to value most those we lose—unjustly enough, perhaps—but there is no justice or logic in grief."

My reply to the letter in which this passage occurred was to go at once to Ballyconor. Jim Leary was asked up to the house the first night, and the dinner passed off, if not very pleasantly, at any rate with-

out any disagreeable episode. But of course a *tête-à-tête* with my mother could not long be avoided, and, after breakfast next morning, with, I could see, an evident effort, she said,

"Come into my room, Mervyn; we ought to have plenty to say to one another."

I followed without remark, my heart already beating at the anticipation of what we indeed might have to say to one another.

And without remark I stood in front of my mother's chair, as she, ever dignified and beautiful and graceful, attempted to begin a conversation the outcome of which might be so terrible to us both.

"Mervyn," at length she said, just as I was beginning to think the clock was ticking in the very centre of my brain, "you were with poor James before he died?"

"I was. He sent for me, and of course I went."

"Was he light-headed?—I mean, did he imagine all sorts of things—dreadful things?"

"He told me things—dreadful things—but he was perfectly sane. I do not think he imagined anything."

My manner and voice must have been very solemn, for I saw her glance at me with sudden alarm—an alarm in which I thought I could detect something of hatred.

"He was a madman for half his life."

"I do not think so. He had suffered a great misfortune, and he brooded, but he was as sane as you or I."

Again that covert glance at me. Then she spoke in a clear ringing voice that seemed to bid defiance to my suspicions, or certainties—

"And what form did his sanity—or, as I call it, madness—take at the last?"

"Dying men speak the truth, and——"

She interrupted me. "Do not be too sure of that. A man who has, as you own,

brooded over an imagined wrong for years is not likely to forget it at the last."

"He forgot nothing—nothing."

My mother turned ashy pale, and her hands moved convulsively to her throat with that curious action we often observe in people greatly moved.

"And you think yourself bound to believe a madman because he left you his money?"

"I believe my uncle told me the truth, and as to the reason you impute to me, mother, you can scarcely know the meaning of your taunt yourself. This I will say, that, sooner than have heard what I did hear from his lips, I would gladly have given up every sixpence I have in the world."

"Enough!" and she rose with that splendid scorn I had so often trembled before. "Enough! I shall not stop to ask you what libels he—my greatest enemy—invented on his death-bed. I shall not at-

tempt—as I might—to show you that your mother's word is worthy to be weighed against that of this madman. You have never been a son to me!"

"Mother!"

"Never! From the first you have thwarted and suspected me. From the first I have foreseen that you were destined to supplant my first-born, my Arthur, my beloved boy! I have long known what was the barrier that lay between us—your envy of the love I gave to him."

"No, mother, no! Even now, with the reason I have for something stronger than blame——"

"Reason!"

She stood proudly before me, as Marie Antoinette may have stood before her low-born judges.

"Yes, reason enough, God knows. Even now, I say, I am willing to give you all the respect a son owes to his mother—yes, and all the love too."

She waved me aside with a scornful gesture.

"No, that you have never given me."

"The respect I have—I do still. But the love? How could I when I was repulsed at every moment? You have never been a mother to me, and I——"

"Must this painful interview be prolonged?" she exclaimed, impatiently. "I know this is your house—all—all is yours; but can you not shorten it? Tell me what you think you know, and let me go."

"My house, mother, is your house. What I have lately learned you know. I will not—nay, I cannot—put it into words. Have you no spark of affection left for me—me whom you have so deeply wronged?"

"I—wronged you—you—the rich man standing in your dead brother's place—enjoying your wealth? Wronged you?"

"Yes; what is wealth to me when I know all? You have wronged me only in a less degree than you wronged my father."

I would have recalled the words directly they were spoken. Such a look of despairing rage as came upon her face I never had seen on mortal face before.

"Oh, God!" she cried, raising her arms in the air—theatrically, a calm bystander might have said; but strong emotion is generally what we call theatrical. "To be punished like this, when I have suffered so long—so long! Mervyn O'Connor, you shall say no more to me. Give me time to seek a place of hiding—of hiding from you as much as from the world. Make your story public—the shame——"

It was my turn to interrupt.

"Remember whose shame it is! Do we not share it, the innocent and the guilty, mother?"

Even as I spoke the re-action came; she sank down into a chair and burst into a passion of tears.

"Mother," and I knelt at her feet and tried to draw her hands from her face—

"mother, will you not let my love console for the past? Does not the sharing of this secret lighten it for you? You cannot believe that another reproach will ever pass my lips. Let the future atone for both of us."

Her sobs ceased. She looked in my eyes, and I saw that she seemed to have aged by ten years in that moment of humiliation.

"Mervyn, can you still——" She hesitated, and let me possess myself of both her hands.

"Mother—be my mother—let me love you as a son should. I only ask one thing before we bury all this—that you should tell me the name of——"

But I spoke to deaf ears. Even as I was speaking, her eyes closed, and she fell back in a faint.

It was long before we could bring her to, and then she was too weak to speak; and I left her, leaving a message to say

that I wished to see her again as soon as she was well. In a few hours I received this note:—

"The only condition on which I can remain in your house another hour is that you promise me never to revert to the subject of to-day's conversation. Unless I have your promise before this evening, I shall, ill as I am, go by the night mail to Dublin, and find some corner in which to die unnoticed."

What could I say? I promised, and in a week left Ballyconor, leaving her still prostrate, and so changed in manner towards me that I could scarcely believe she was the same proud woman I had known all my life.

All her jealousy of my legitimate interference with the estate had vanished, and her humility and timidity in my presence were touching to see. Dear old Jim Leary was more puzzled than he had ever been before.

"What's come to her Ladyship, Mervyn?" he asked, as he said good-bye to me in the hall. "She's as sweet as buttermilk now—never hints that I'm an old fool, and can't keep my accounts correctly—although, be gorra! she's not far wrong on occasions. And when I asked her yesterday about the thinning in the plantations, she told me that she had nothing to do with it, and that it was yourself that must settle it. Oh! it's sad to see a fine masterful woman take that way. Do you think she's failing, Mervyn?"

There were tears in the honest old man's eyes as I answered—

"She has had a shock, and perhaps she has grown weary of doing my work, Jim."

"Well, it'll be a good thing if she can make you give up swelling the crowd of absentee landlords with which Ireland swarms. You'll come and live here now—eh, Mervyn?"

"No—I think not. You must look after everything for a time, at any rate—always

obeying my mother implicitly if she chooses to give an order. And remember that I am rich now, and that, if I ever hear of any tenants of mine being in want, I'll—well, I'll cut off your fox-hunting, old fellow."

"In want, is it? There are only three things the tenants on the Ballyconor estate want now. One is yourself home for good——"

"And the others?"

"And the others are a little reduction in the price and a little addition to the strength of the whisky at the shebeen houses."

So I got upon my car and drove away from the house the owner of which I was called, as it seemed to me, in bitter mockery of my birth, with my brain still seething from the result of my dead uncle's revelation.

CHAPTER XXII.

BROODING.

"WHO was that fellow speaking to you in the morning-room just now?"

"That! Oh, Mervyn O'Connor."

"Is it? What's the matter with him? He looks very sulky."

"Then he only looks what he is. I can scarcely believe it is the same fellow. I give you my word that a short time ago, when he came back from Canada, after dropping in for old Gilbeau's money, he was the most cheery, open-handed fellow you could well find, and now——"

"Now he certainly don't seem that."

"Seem it! No, indeed! He scarcely ever speaks, and when he does it is only to say something so infernally disagreeable that he had better have held his tongue. They say he grudges every penny he spends, and all his pals——"

"Abuse him behind his back," said I, rising from the sofa in the Club smoking-room where I was hidden in the gloom. "But then they ought to take care it's a good long way behind his back."

My friend—for the speaker was by way of having that privilege—muttered something unintelligible and got out of the room as well as he could, probably congratulating himself that he had no tail to indicate his moral collapse; and I sat down again to think over what he had said. It was true. I felt that. Every month that had elapsed since my uncle's death, and the revelation that had accompanied it, had added to the gloom that was closing in upon my life. It is not

rare for illegitimate sons to have a morbid horror of illegitimacy, and to me my false position—for which there was no possible remedy—was daily and hourly torture. To give up my rights to the O'Connor name and property would have proclaimed my mother's shame; and, besides, there was absolutely no relation whom I could by any possibility imagine myself to be defrauding of his just rights; and yet to myself I was an arch impostor, and every time I heard my own name I winced with shame and humiliation. That they called me stingy I now, for the first time, became aware; but here they were wrong. I simply spent no money because it gave me no pleasure to spend it. Pleasure among my fellows I could not take, and any ostentation that would have been natural to my position I shrank from as only an aggravation of my innocent imposture. I felt doomed to masquerade through life in a character to which

I had no real right—to assume a part waking and sleeping for which I had a horror.

And so I sat alone and brooded, and nursed bitter thoughts which now and then broke through the silence that was becoming habitual to me, and completed the work, which that taciturnity had begun, of making me thoroughly unpopular among my contemporaries. It seemed so short a time since I had believed in everything and everybody; when to me my mother, if somewhat cold and proud, was the embodiment of female virtue; when Gertrude Monymusk was the incarnation of softness and purity; when Bayley North was that priceless thing—a true friend; and now all my idols were shattered. One was the cause of my undying shame, and the other two had deceived and betrayed me. How could I live on? I saw strong men sicken and die, men longing for life and its pleasures, and I, who prayed each night that for

me another morning might not dawn, could not so much as have a headache. The heartache—which *will* not kill the body—absorbed all other disease. I felt that I was doomed to drag out a long, useless, purposeless existence, always alone with my secret of shame. Had I been able to confide in anyone, it would no doubt have done me much good. A sturdy, sensible friend might have reasoned or laughed me out of my gloomy fancies; but to me, for my mother's sake, silence seemed inevitable, and a grief borne alone is always trebly heavy.

That "imitation" of happiness which, it is said, money can always bring was not purchasable in my case. The income I enjoyed was a nuisance to me in that it entailed some thought and arrangement, and still more because it almost forced me to turn my attention to charity on an organized plan. And, after a time—a whole year or so of existence rather than life—it did so

force me; and before long I began to get interested in my work, and to understand a little of the inner life of those whose outward appearance was, to a casual observer, against their possessing such a thing as an inner life at all.

One thing especially struck me amongst the very poor—their immense contempt for death. Not because they looked upon it as the crossing of the river which divides dark life from bright eternity, as the snapping of the chain that bound them to drudgery, and penury, and squalor, but simply because it seemed to them an every-day and not particularly interesting occurrence which came to all, and was, therefore, not worthy of special remark or thought. When I remembered Lord Dives and his medical attendant, and his careful diet, and his solemn looks when the death of one of his contemporaries appeared in the *Times*, I could not help looking with some respect upon Bill Sikes. Every way as big a blackguard

as his Lordship, lying there upon his straw palliasse, and smoking his last pipe hastily, so that he might have the full benefit of the last penn'orth of baccy ere he went where probably there would be no more smoking —of the baccy kind at least—he had no more philosophy in him than Lord Dives himself; no views as to a future state; he knew he was dying, and he wasn't afraid, because it was what he had always known he should do—perhaps the only certainty in his haphazard life—and because he was not given to be afraid.

Lord Dives, when his time comes, lying on his comfortable spring mattress, with doctors consulting, and relations simulating tears over him, will not face the great certainty with half the gentleman-like ease of Bill Sikes, even though he may have the sleekest of parsons to whisper in his ear that soon he will be in Paradise.

In my visits to the slums I occasionally heard the name of Mrs. Mayne—whom I

knew to be Lady Monymusk—mentioned, and always with the tenderest love and reverence. And once we met for a moment. She was praying at the bedside of a dying child in a hospital, and, as I looked at her, I found it hard to believe that she was—what she was.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE DOUBT IS DISPELLED.

WHAT she was! Yes; could there be a doubt? We have all read of the lady who was justly indignant with her lover because he trusted his eyesight before her word; but this was in Arcadian days. Now we believe everything we see, and most things that we hear concerning a lady; and I certainly had seen enough to justify me in not rating Lady Monymusk's character very highly. Over Bayley North's chambers door might have been written, "All good name abandon ye who enter here." To know him intimately was a

liberal education in that knowledge a woman should be ignorant of; to attend the little tea-parties in the Albany was to descend a good many steps of the staircase that leads to social reprobation; to be present at one of the suppers there was to have reached the very bottom flight—to be left howling in the black abyss of social oblivion. They were agreeable enough, too, those little gatherings after the play, when champagne and oysters went down, and spades were called spades in a way that should have delighted a philosopher—only philosophers were never invited (unless, indeed, the *nil admirari* school of young clothes-pegs is not the truest school of philosophy after all); and men talked men's talk with the advantage that they were answered—also in men's talk, but—in women's voices; when a club anecdote gained a double zest as it came from a pair of red and smiling lips, and a broad allusion was broadened by the pretty shrug of the white shoulders that accom-

panied it. Pleasant enough they were. The best men—Bayley North was very particular about his men—and the worst women of Society. What could have been a better combination?

But why am I writing in this fashion—and of him? Let me get on. There is not much more to tell, and all the attempted jocularity and sarcasm in the world will not render its telling a whit less bitter. Who will finish the story, if it is ever finished? Why am I writing it? Is there a moral in it? Perhaps; in most things there is a moral; it all depends whether we know how to look for it. But in my case I scarcely know what good the publication of this true tale of a bit of a life, this story of remorseless fate—for I believe my uncle James is right, after all—can do. If things were useful according to their difficulty, this should be a work destined to raise me to immortality; for none can ever know how my heart has ached as I have recalled

the past and set down here, in light tones, and having regard to the scenes and feelings I was describing, the events of my short career. It would have been untrue, in art at least, had I allowed the gloom that now wraps its close to obscure the bright commencement of that career. Few men are fatalists until Fate has overtaken them. Presentiments are rarer than people suppose, although liver complaint and indigestion sometimes take the form of dire prognostication.

What she was! The more I brooded in my self-inflicted unpopularity and solitude, the more my thoughts reverted to that sweet smile which had, while I believed in Gertrude Monymusk, been to me as the smile of an angel of light. The thoughts are apt to become very despotic if allowed too much sway, and, do what I would, mine continually reverted to that happy time, and insisted on skipping the intermediate days of awak-

ening from the dream which was so full of boyish innocence and credulity. The discovery that—whatever her failings—she had at least the virtue that covers a multitude of sins, was rather a shock to the resolution I had, after much heart-torturing, formed concerning her; and it certainly seemed hard to believe that a woman who was as she was could vary her visits to the Albany by visits to the poor. Still, as I observed with my crude philosophy, it was a common thing for people to—as Butler says—

> "Compound for sins they are inclined to,
> By damning those they have no mind to."

And, like the gentleman whose magnitude of sinning during the week might be accurately gauged by the fervour of his praying in church on Sunday, it was quite possible, thought I, that she made up by charitable acts in the slums for peccadilloes in St. James's.

But, let her reasons be what they might, one thing was certain, that I could not get

her out of my mind; and, the longer I sat still and thought, the stronger became the conviction that the boy-love had, despite suspicion, despite absence, grown into a real passion. I idealised her—not her as I thought I knew her to be in my sane moments—but as I had once dreamed her to be—a type of pure womanhood. Naturally poetic in temperament, I invented a splendid fancy—I raised a deity for myself, and I worshipped it day and night.

I will not apologise for having thus, perhaps, lengthily described my feelings, for I want my readers to understand accurately what was the state of my mind when I was sitting one evening in my room at Manor Lodge.

Soon after my uncle's death, his solicitors had applied to me as to what was to be done with the house. I had no object in being near the haunts of my fellow Club men, so I sold the house in Park Lane, and went to live at Wandsworth: a second

edition of its late owner—even to the dogs (which I kept)—and the surly old servant, whom I permitted to stay on as a sort of pensioner and doer of odd jobs. There was a rather curiously-selected number of books in the room where I had first seen my uncle —which was called the library—mostly bearing on different forms of superstition; and the perusal of them, as I sat alone at night and longed to feel sleepy, as I used to feel in the old days, when to sleep was to forget nothing worse than debt, when to wake was to wake to hope, did not do much towards extracting me from the morbid state into which I had fallen.

One evening—in the depth of winter—I was sitting in the long, dark room, lit only by the reading-lamp on the table by my side, when, looking up, I saw a woman standing opposite. So absorbed had I been in reading that I heard no footfall, no noise of the door opening. I put down my book —I remember how calm I felt, though

there was a curious tingling sensation in my veins—and I said, fully knowing what the answer would be—

"Who are you?"

I knew what the answer would be. She was dead or dying, and had come to me at last, purified by death; our love sanctified at last, now that all grossness had been purged from it.

"Who are you?"

She put up her veil, and I saw the features as I so well knew them; only the expression now was one of terror—of mighty terror.

Gertrude Monymusk!

I sat still, in a trance of happiness, and I said—

"I knew you would come to me at last, Gertrude."

She did not stir. She only looked at me, and the horror in her eyes seemed to burn in, through mine, to my very soul.

"I have watched and waited for you—at

least, not I, but my heart. Only in death could we love. In life you betrayed me—betrayed your husband—all—but now—"

"Mervyn!"

The tones in which she exclaimed my name awoke me. It was Lady Monymusk herself—no spirit—that stood before me.

She went on, still standing there in front of me, still with that horror in her great eyes—

"Mervyn O'Connor, I come to you to save me. I am in terror of my life."

My senses had returned, and I placed a chair for her, into which she sank with a gesture of infinite weariness.

"Your life?"

"Yes. Will you not help me? You—cared for me once."

"Lady Monymusk, I—but tell me your trouble. I can at least give advice."

"I want more than that. Advice is useless when action is wanted. I am in the power of an unscrupulous man. I have

offended him; he will use his power this very day; and I shall be killed—I shall be killed!"

It was real physical terror that had seized her. I could see that as she covered her face with her hands and trembled throughout her whole frame.

I made the speech of a scoundrel; but remember—I had loved her—I loved her still.

"Surely some one else—surely your friend, Colonel North——"

"It is he who has me in his power."

Again my evil spirit possessed me.

"A power of that kind is only to be charmed by kindness."

She laid her hand upon my arm. Trembling as it was, I think its touch made me tremble the most.

"You believe," she said, very slowly, "that I ever—cared for—that man?"

"I was walking down the Albany one evening——"

"Yes, yes. I ought to have—but how *could* I explain? Hear me now, and if I stop do not speak. I must put it all as clearly as I can. Look in my face, and then disbelieve me."

I looked at her, and every word she uttered was to me confirmation strong as proof of Holy Writ.

"Colonel North has known me since first I came out in London. You think you know him, but you have no idea of what he can be when he has determined on conquering the heart of a woman. With me he failed—failed utterly and entirely. Something in my nature rebelled against his hardly-veiled cynicism and contempt for all that I had been taught to look upon as good and true. His intellect now and then took a hold upon mine, but of love for him I never had a particle. I swear it to you. My father and mother were poor. They had made great sacrifices, and pinched themselves and my sister to give me a

season in London. To go back with them after the success I may without vanity tell *you* I made seemed ingratitude—unkindness. I had several offers. One was from a man to whom—no matter now. I think you told me you had heard the story. Of the others, Lord Monymusk's seemed the best—the most acceptable. He at any rate loved me devotedly, and I knew I could make him a good wife. I have made him a good wife."

From the moment she said those words, looking in my face, all my doubts of her ended for ever.

"But I never could love him, though I prayed each night that I might be led to do so. He was kind, rather suspicious, and capable of anything should there have been any real reason for suspicion. But there was none, until some silly rumour—totally without foundation—reached his ears. I cared for the man as much as I care for one of my own footmen. He was a well-

dressed, chattering creature, who called my carriage and danced beautifully. One night Monymusk came to a ball when I had danced a good many times with that man. That night, when we were alone, and the rest of the house asleep, he tried to strangle me."

"Good God!"

"I never knew how I escaped; but, half dead, I did manage to leave the room, with him pursuing me, and to rouse the servants. My poor husband was a raving lunatic, and it took three of them to keep him from my throat. There is no use in dwelling on what followed. I refused to seek the protection I might. I persuaded him, when he became calmer, of the injustice of his suspicions, and I made myself responsible—even to his own relations, who counselled a private asylum—for his actions. More than once in the next few days the madness—for such it was—burst out; but I never was again in the danger of that awful night. More than once I have had to leave London

suddenly with him, and go anywhere—to some wild country, even—to allay his mad suspicions. Mervyn, my life has been a terrible one—— But, no! do not say a word of sympathy. I dare not break down until I have told you all."

I checked the words I was about to say, and she proceeded—

"Then at last, longing for sympathy—for a little of that love which was denied me—I met a man who—who, in short, was capable, I thought, of understanding me. One is not always mistress of one's own thoughts; one ought to be mistress of one's pen. I committed a great folly. Though repulsing at its outset the declaration I saw trembling on his lips, I wrote to a woman—one I thought my dearest friend—one whom I have loaded with benefits—and opened my heart—my whole heart—to her. She kept the letter; why, I cannot tell—probably not for any reason; and then Bayley

North became her friend. She confided everything to him, and one day showed him this letter, which he easily gained possession of. Then began my long agony. He threatened me. Frightened as I was, I dared to defy him, and told him to show the letter, as he threatened, to my husband. At last he said that he had changed his mind, and would give up the letter; but on one condition—that I came to his chambers to take it. I went."

"And that was when——"

"That was the only time. When I came he laughed at me. I prayed to him, and he laughed the more. His reason for having brought me there was only to gall my pride, he said. I left him—without my letter—with the sword still hanging over my head. And each day it has come nearer to descending. Bayley North has lately taken every opportunity of going to places I am obliged to go to, and what he thinks his love

for me has increased. Only to-day he came to me and swore that unless I—you can guess, Mervyn—Oh! that I should have to say such things to you!—he would this very night—he is dining at our house, my husband having lately taken a fancy to him—he would this very night show him that letter in my hand, and my husband will kill me! What can I do?"

Notwithstanding her story, a sense of ineffable joy had stolen over me, and I asked her—

"Tell me the name of him whom that letter was about."

She hesitated—a blush spread over her pale cheeks.

"Tell me, Gertrude; you do not think I would take advantage of your confidence. I believe every word of what you have said. Only tell me."

"Will you forgive me?" That was her only answer in words, but her eyes spoke all.

Thank God that in that wild moment of mad happiness I restrained myself. I lifted her hand to my lips. That was all.

Then, after a pause, she spoke again—

"What can I do?"

"He shall never show that letter."

"But how can he be prevented? I know his determination. His former fancy has been succeeded by something very like passion; he will not hesitate at any revenge."

"He shall never show that letter."

"You can stop him?"

"I will kill him first."

She came close up to me—her breath was on my cheek, her eyes looked into my heart.

"Do you know why in my mortal terror —for I am afraid to die, and this would mean death—I came to you, Mervyn?"

"I do know, Gertrude. I do know; and I thank you."

In another half-hour she was in one

hansom proceeding to Hertford Street, whilst I in another made the best of my way to the Albany.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT THE ALBANY.

BAYLEY NORTH'S chambers were situated on the second floor of a house in the Albany. Very comfortable they were—two large rooms adjoining one another, one used as a sitting and one as a dining-room, and a bed-room at the back almost as large; the whole being entered through a neat little hall, with box-room opening off it. The owner was celebrated among his friends—even his discriminating friends—for his taste and knowledge of art; not the sham thing called "high art" by a set of ignorant ladies and gentlemen

who, unable to attain distinction in any other way, have invented a jargon of which outsiders can scarcely, not understanding it, detect all the folly; but art, true and real, if not particularly high; art in its relation to everyday life and comfort; art which followed no cut-and-dried rule of self-constituted professors, and yet which aimed solely at harmony, and strained not at all at astonishing or bewildering the nervous spectator. There was not an article of furniture in his rooms that was either uncomfortable, unfitted to fulfil its purpose, or unsightly.

Very often the fitness of things constitutes their beauty, and a hat-stand, modelled on the very best and most "chaste" Chippendale principles, would be repellent if it refused comfortably to hang hats.

It requires very great devotion at the art-and-water shrine now erected in our fashionable circles to be able to enjoy a chair in which sitting up straight is only just less ex-

cruciating than leaning back; but then the devotees of our "empty day" are very devoted, provided only the object of their adoration is as empty as the day and as their own heads.

But I see that I am wasting time on the threshold of the end of this story, hesitating to tell what I have set myself to tell, moralizing over furniture when—— To resume.

I reached the Albany, as I had calculated, just in time. North's servant told me he was still at home, although his brougham had arrived at the Burlington Gardens entrance to take him out to dinner. The honest fellow grinned with delight as he ushered me in.

"You haven't been to see us for an age, Sir Mervyn—so glad as I was, too, to hear you had come back from foreign parts—and looking so well, sir, too, if I may take the liberty of saying so."

I waited a few moments in the sitting-

room, where the fumes of the last cigarette its owner had smoked before dressing—how well I remembered the long talks we had over that last cigarette when I had come to fetch him for some amusement we had planned together—still hung in the air. There was a litter of little ladylike notes on the round table in the corner; a mass of dinner and ball invitations jostled each other on the glass over the mantel-piece; a great engagement-book lay open, with its pages crowded with cabalistic signs legible only to their writer; one or two cards requesting Colonel North's attendance at this or that Club Committee; opera ivories; tickets of admission to private racecourse-stands; photographs of great ladies jumbled up with tantalizing presentments of stars of the drama; a few receipts; a good many unpaid bills; a six-and-a-half-sized glove; a fan; a fresh bouquet, destined before long to be in the hands of some blushing and delighted damsel; the last success in literature, opened

at the title-page, with the words "from the author" written there: all the litter around spoke the busy man of pleasure, to whom every moment is forced to bring some excitement, some new interest. It may seem strange that I should remark all this, but there are moments in our lives which we feel are just about to bring forth some great crisis, when we remark everything, each detail of what is around, and never forget the most trivial circumstances.

The last time I had been in the room was when I had looked up to Bayley North as the embodiment of that fashion and success towards which nearly all young men, when first turned loose in Society, strive. His kindness to me had at first completely turned my head; and when I, as I often did, heard tales of his cynicism and calm brutality, I was glad to think that I knew the man as he was; that I, for some reason I could not fathom, had penetrated behind the outer skin of worldliness, and

could gauge the worth of the generosity and kindness that really existed under the apparently impervious exterior. Not a word of really bad advice had he ever given me. I had learned from him much that was useful to me in life. Although so mistrustful himself, he had not taught me to mistrust—for, as he had often said to me, "What would I not give to believe! There is the one great change from happiness in life to the reverse—the moment when one ceases to believe. Go on trusting everyone as long as you can, my dear boy. Draw upon that account as long as the authorities will cash the cheques. It is the great pleasure of existence." Then his deed—not his word—had broken off, with my belief in himself and in Gertrude, much of my belief in others. And now—now that I knew how foolish part of my doubts had been—I had come to him again, this time to avenge a wrong, to extract a reparation, or else—to execute a vengeance.

I had no settled plan of action. But never for a moment did I doubt my eventual success.

The door leading from the bed-room opened, and he entered—as perfectly dressed, as sarcastically calm as ever.

"Johnson told me you were here. I am sorry to have kept you waiting."

"It doesn't matter. Thanks, I won't sit down. Colonel North, I have something serious to say to you."

"Well, Sir Mervyn," he used my title with a slight accent of sarcasm—good-natured, but certainly there; "please say it as quickly as may be. You know I detest putting my hostess out, and getting cold soup besides cold looks, and it is just a quarter to eight. I must be in Hertford Street in ten minutes."

Saying this, he glanced at the clock, and sat down, in that lolling attitude I knew so well, in an arm-chair.

I thought for a moment to arrange my words, and then began—

"I had an interview to-day with Lady Monymusk."

"Indeed! I thought that you and she were—not exactly friends—*now*." The stress he laid upon the last word would have fired my resentment at any other time. Now my errand was paramount.

"I once thought Lady Monymusk the best and purest of God's creatures. You know why I ceased to think so."

"I remember you told me something—something about her calling on me, wasn't it? Will you touch that bell? Thanks."

I complied without thinking, and had to wait while he gave his servant orders to go out and give some message to his coachman.

"But I have to-day heard from her own lips the whole story. I know the truth, Colonel North."

He laughed, but it seemed to me the merriment was not quite real.

"The idea of a woman telling the truth

about herself! You have grown younger and more credulous since we last met, Mervyn."

"I believe her. That is enough, Colonel North."

He bowed his head mockingly.

"Very pretty. I wish I could believe a woman. Well?"

"I know why she came here. I know what the cowardly weapon is you threaten her with. I know you to be a scoundrel!"

He started to his feet with a oath, and I was prepared for a blow; but in a moment his mood changed.

"Go on—go on; I will hear even that—from you."

Why did not the accent of his voice as he said those last two words warn me? But even had I been warned I think I should have acted as I did. Gertrude's honour and safety were and must be first with me.

"What is a man who, when repulsed by

a woman, treacherously obtains evidence against her which he knows to be false, but which he also knows can ruin her? Is he not a scoundrel, sir?"

"I cannot waste time on speculative moralising. Your parables or riddles are no doubt capital, but I object to them when I am anxious to go to dinner."

"You have threatened this very night to show that letter you so infamously obtained to Lord Monymusk—is that your intention?"

"As you got your information from that infallible source—Gertrude——"

"*Lady* Monymusk, sir."

"Well, the Viscountess Monymusk, if we are to stand on so much ceremony. I say, as you have evidently got your information from her, it must be correct, and—— I think you know I am not given to say what I do not mean."

"And you dare go to this woman's house, and sit at her table——"

"Pooh! By law it is her husband's

house—her husband's table. He is a great friend of mine. Surely it is the duty of a friend to warn him against betrayal, and, if necessary, to prove that his warnings are not causeless."

As he spoke he touched the breast-pocket of his coat meaningly, and I knew where the letter was.

"The proof is worth nothing. You know it is worth nothing."

"We won't enter into my feelings. Whether Lord Monymusk will take that view is the question in point. I hope he may, for I am always for hushing up domestic scandals."

His careless tone had nearly by this time succeeded in driving me out of the calm I had schooled myself to preserve.

"Take care! Do you know why I have come here—what I have sworn? I have come to receive from you the letter. I have sworn that neither you nor I leave this house until that is done."

"Quite a knight-errant of the Middle Ages. Only we don't live in the Middle Ages, and you are an anachronism. The ten minutes I could spare you are over. I shouldn't like to be rude to Lady Monymusk, especially on this occasion, and keep her Ladyship waiting for dinner. So good evening, Sir Mervyn O'Connor."

He rose, and I stood before him. We were evenly matched, but youth and condition were on my side.

"You do not go unless you give it me."

He fronted me with a calm disdain that was almost grand.

"You forget, my friend, that there are such things as policemen in this civilized city. As I said before, we are not in the Middle Ages. Possibly you might give me a black eye before I reached that bell, but most assuredly you would spend your evening in a police-station. I must decline, just before dinner, to indulge in fisticuffs or

other bargee tricks. You have your remedy, if you think you can find a friend who will agree with you that you may shoot at me for not parting with my property. Let me pass."

"I tell you that I will have that letter."

"And I tell you that I decline to make you a present of it."

"Then I will take it."

As we spoke he had moved on towards the hall door, and I with him. It was open, and before I could do anything he had stepped out on the landing, and stood at the top of the stone steps. It was dark, for the gaslight was on the next floor. Then I seized him by the coat-collar. My object was not, as he supposed, to administer chastisement to him. I knew where the letter was, and as he prepared to meet a blow I feigned at his face I plunged my hand into his breast-pocket, and, before he could prevent me, had drawn it therefrom.

Then the struggle began in earnest. He

was nearly as strong as I, and I now remained on the defence, while he fought desperately to regain the crumpled envelope. At last, in warding him off, I dropped it, and it fluttered down upon the second step below us. Our struggle had made no noise, and we were both of us too much out of breath to speak now. There was the letter—who would pick it up? He dragged me gradually down—first one step, then another. He seemed to be possessed by the strength of a madman. I was for the moment powerless. He pressed me with all his might against the wall, and as I fought myself free, and managed to rise up from the stooping position into which I had got. I saw that he had nearly succeeded—that the letter was almost in his grasp!

Almost, but not quite! As he stooped down to pick it up I put all my strength into one push. He lost his footing, missed both me and the balusters with his hands, which as he fell he flung up. There was a

second's silence, and, in the darkening gloom of the stairs beneath me, a crash, and then again silence. I picked up the letter and hurried down.

For a moment I thought he was dead. I saw blood trickling down his white forehead, and his eyes were closed. I raised him up and he groaned.

"Are you much hurt?"

He tried to speak, failed, and then articulated, with difficulty,

"I don't know. Go, go! It isn't your fault, at any rate. You have won. If I die—remember—it was an accident—no one knows. Johnson is outside—no one knows. Go quickly—go!"

"I will send Johnson in, but let me get you upstairs first."

"No; Johnson will come back. Go, I say! I have a right to command you. Go—and know nothing of this!"

"I cannot go until——"

"I have never asserted my authority be-

fore—but—you cannot refuse once to obey —your father!"

"My father!"

"Go!—it is my last request!"

I obeyed. Mad with horror, I obeyed. I flew down the Albany to Piccadilly, not knowing what I did; for hours I roamed wildly about the streets, the passers-by turning to stare at me as if I were a ghost.

It must have been early morning as I, still in a dream of horror, passed by the door of a Club to which I belonged. Two men, both of whom I knew, were coming out. They had apparently met at the door, and were lighting their cigars.

"Terrible news about poor Bayley! Those beastly dark staircases are very dangerous. Never spoke again, I am told."

"Yes, he did. I saw Cartler, who saw his servant. He just managed to say he slipped as he was hurrying down, and that Mervyn O'Connor had left him five minutes before."

"Rum chap that O'Connor. Poor old Bayley! Well, one must die somehow, after all. He had a jolly life of it. Good night."

The next thing I knew was that I was in my bed-room at Manor House, with a doctor leaning over me, and saying that the crisis was over.

CHAPTER XXV.

AND LAST.

THE crisis, as the doctor meant it, was over; but the real crisis—the crisis in that part of life which is beyond the skill of the medical profession—had but just begun. As I slowly came back to full consciousness I saw written everywhere, in letters of blood, on the wall opposite my bed, on the white ceiling, in the bit of sky I could see through the window, the words, "You have killed your father!" And I was not so innocent of parricide as it seemed. Something *had* warned me all along; there *had* been an indefinable tie between me and

Bayley North, a sentiment which was, in the days when we were together, stronger than mere friendship. Even when I had bearded him in his room, and denounced him as a scoundrel, I felt that there was some reason—mysterious to me, and yet not altogether surprising—which accounted for the absence of the resentment he would have so quickly shown had another man said those words to him. Even in my direst fury against the man, I had been half angry with myself because that fury did not seem quite commensurate with his offence.

Had I heard the story of his misdeeds from any woman but Gertrude Monymusk —had he injured anyone but her—I should have conquered my hatred of meanness and cruelty, and been friends with him still.

Whether or not there is such a thing as "natural affection" I do not know. But I do know that now he had died by my hand even my love for Gertrude was almost

swallowed up in my remorse for having been the instrument of a just vengeance.

It was some time before I was sufficiently recovered to be allowed to talk and to read my letters and the newspapers. Rest for the brain, said the doctor, was the requisite. As if my brain *now* ever could rest again! It was strange, as I lay there and thought, and thought, till I felt I was going mad, how at last my mind utterly threw off all control, and seemed, against my will, to revel in the most grotesque, even comic, incidents and imaginations. One day the old servant came and found me laughing loudly at some conceit that had occurred to me, and his astonishment knew no bounds. He did not know that there is a state of despair in which all feelings, real feelings are merged.

Those on the surface are allowed to go of themselves, and indicate the truth beneath as the tickings of a clock indicate the time of day.

Eagerly, once it was permitted, I read

my letters. They were all uninteresting, save two. These were from Gertrude. The first was dated the day after I had seen her—

"I write the first thing in the morning. Oh, Mervyn, you have saved me! He did not come. How did you prevent him? At any rate, I feel that you have saved me. How can I thank you? I have no way. None at all—none. And, Mervyn, I know you well enough to know you would rather I had none. In this world I fear hearts have little place. But friendship is permitted. I shall see you soon?

"GERTRUDE."

Then, in a hurried postscript—

"I have just seen the papers. What a dreadful thing! Had you seen him? Even after what he was to me, I could not help grieving. Was it Providence?"

The next letter was dated a week later.

"I have been hoping to see you, Mervyn. Yet I cannot complain of your absence. You probably may have, as I have, some suspicion as to that poor misguided man's death.

I shuddered as I read—

"I see by the inquest that he told his servant he had just seen you. You think he may have been so agitated by that interview that he missed his footing; or do you think—— But no, Mervyn, my friend, men do not kill themselves in such a way; and, as to the first theory, it is equally baseless. The bit of orange-peel on which he slipped would have been there anyhow, and from my knowledge of Bayley North, he was not a man to be agitated by anything. This has been a terrible experience in our lives. Let us forget it."

Forget it!

I turned to the papers, and found the account of the inquest. Here it is—

"An inquest was held yesterday at ——, on the body of Colonel Bayley North, who was found dead on the staircase outside his chambers in the Albany, Piccadilly. The principal witness examined was George Johnson, his valet, who deposed :—

"'I am body-servant to the deceased, and have been so for the last seven years. On Tuesday last he came home, as usual to him, at about seven o'clock. He seemed in his usual spirits. I remember he called me a d—d fool for forgetting to take a note to Lady——'

"Here the Coroner interposed, and said that no names need unnecessarily be brought in.

"The witness resumed:—

"'He smoked a cigarette, and then dressed for dinner. He was going to dine with——'

"The witness was again told that these details were not required.

"'I am sure he never thought of suicide,

for I had, by his orders, got him a half-crown button-hole flower that evening. Just before he was dressed, Sir Mervyn O'Connor called, and I showed him in. He was a great friend of my master's—a very nice, pleasant gentleman. They had not met for some time, as Sir Mervyn had been abroad with the army. They talked for a few minutes, and then Colonel North rang the bell and told me to go down to the brougham, which was waiting at the Burlington Gardens end of the Albany, and tell the coachman, after he had deposited his master, to take a letter to Grosvenor Square. I waited, chatting with the coachman—waiting for the Colonel to come to the brougham. I knew his dinner was for eight o'clock, as I had seen the invitation——'

"A juror interrupted to ask how he had seen it.

"The witness, indignantly:—

"'On the mantelpiece, of course. I never

looked at my master's private letters. I waited till half-past eight o'clock, and then I began to get uneasy. I thought we had made some mistake, and that the brougham should have been at the Piccadilly end. So I went back to the chambers, and, as I was going upstairs, on the second step below the landing on the floor where they were, I found him lying—bleeding from the head. He was unconscious. I obtained assistance, and we carried him in and put him on his bed. Dr. Jamesy came and said there was no hope. His skull was fractured. He lived for two hours; and, about half an hour before he died, he said to me, the doctor being there, "You there, Johnson?"—these were his very words—"faithful fellow! faithful fellow! He is gone?" I asked him what he meant, and he said, "Sir Mervyn," and then he went on before I could answer, "Of course he has. I slipped —slipped, Johnson, as I hurried downstairs. I was running, as I was so late. Sir Mervyn

left me ten minutes before; as I had to wait to write a note. I slipped on a bit of orange-peel, I think—a bit of orange-peel." These were his exact words. He never spoke again before he died.

"By the Coroner: A gentleman living on the top floor often ate oranges. Witness had often noticed bits of peel on the staircase. Couldn't swear he saw any that night; but then he was flurried.

"After Dr. Henry Arthur Jamesy, of 905, Piccadilly, had given evidence as to the cause of death, the Coroner summed up. He said he should have liked to hear the evidence of the last person who had seen the deceased alive, but he held in his hand a medical certificate that Sir Mervyn O'Connor was dangerously ill and could not attend.

"A juror remarked that they were all perfectly satisfied.

"The Coroner said that he deprecated interruption on the part of the jury. It

was his business to tell them the law. In this case it seemed perfectly clear that the deceased had fallen in hurrying down a steep flight of stone steps. The jury had viewed the premises, and could form their own opinion as to the probability of such an occurrence; they could also form an opinion as to whether the accident was caused directly or indirectly by orange-peel carelessly left on the stairs.

"The jury found that the deceased met his death by accidentally falling downstairs, and added a rider severely censuring the habit of leaving pieces of orange-peel lying on staircases or pavements. In the latter case the police should have orders to remove them.

"The Coroner: 'To justify their appellation of peelers, I suppose.' (Loud laughter.)"

* * * * * *

When, nearly two months after my being taken ill, I was for the first time allowed out of the house, I staggered like a drunken man with weakness, and had to be helped into

my carriage. I had but one idea, one longing—to tell the truth. Twenty times in the last few weeks of convalescence I had begun the dreadful story to my mother, who had come over from Ireland to nurse me; but each time the words froze on my lips. The revelation to her would indeed be terrible, and I shrank from inflicting such a blow on her even who had cursed my life in giving it to me. She had changed terribly. An old, sad, stern woman now. Silent, humble; and always inexpressibly melancholy. Day after day she sat with me in that dark room, and now and again, as my thoughts in their turbulence forced themselves out of my mouth in confused murmurings and ravings, I saw her quail before me—perchance saying to herself that I was suffering for her sin. One day she prevailed on me, after long entreaty, to let her bring a new doctor to pronounce on my case. It seemed odd, as I was then mending in body rapidly; but I humoured her, poor woman, and he

came. Women are intense doctor worshippers: but that she should have believed in this one was indeed extraordinary. The man simply came to chat. My health he certainly inquired after, but in a most perfunctory way; his one aim seemed to be to draw me into conversation, and only my wish not to annoy my mother prevented my having the gossip turned out of the house.

My first visit, once I could emerge from that dark house of mine, inhabited by those demons—remorseful thoughts—was to Hertford Street. I found Gertrude at home and alone. She started back, and turned pale at the sight of me.

"Is it you, Mervyn? How you are changed! Oh! how bad your illness must have been! You are worn, and old, and grey, my poor boy!"

I had not thought of it before—it seemed all so trivial; but my hair certainly is grey now, and my face—what does it matter?

"Gertrude," I said, and before her fresh young beauty—for she was now a girl compared with me—my voice sounded like a voice from the grave, "I have come to tell you the truth. I love you!"

Something in my looks or my voice frightened her. She shrank away from me, and stood close to the bell on the other side of the room. I advanced nearer to her, and as I did so I saw one of her hands behind go gradually towards that bell.

"But that is not all the truth I have come to tell. You knew that!"

"Mervyn!"

"Yes, you knew that all along. No matter. The other truth you did not know. I went to Bayley North to recover a letter of yours which he threatened to use against you. Here it is."

I handed it to her. She took it mechanically, her eyes fixed, with something very like fear, upon my face.

"You do not thank me?"

"Oh, Mervyn, why do you look so strange? Not thank you! You know that every feeling of my heart is yours. You know I thank you!"

She caught my hand and kissed it. I drew it back hurriedly.

"Before you kiss that hand it is right you should know what it has done. It is right you should know the price I paid for that letter."

"What do you mean?"

"Bayley North died by my hand!"

"Oh, God!"

"And he was my father!"

She turned on me with a wild gesture of desperation that was superb. I marked its beauty even then.

"Are you mad, Mervyn? He died of an accident, and—your father!"

I seized her hand, and bent down towards her little ear, whispering, and she shrank back from me at every word, till she could go no farther, being against the wall.

"He refused to give it me. We struggled. I was the stronger, and I threw him down. Lying there in his blood, he told me—told me when he was dying—that he was my father; and I *know* he spoke the truth. I killed him—for your sake?"

No answer. My grasp of her wrist must have hurt her. She moaned. Was it pain, sorrow, or fear?

"I killed him, Gertrude, for your sake! Will you reward me? I am accursed. By my own act I am cast out of the society of my fellow-creatures for ever. But it was for you I did it. Are you not mine by every law, human or divine? Will you come with me? You only know the truth. Let us go far away, where we may be alone with this horrible secret. I have but two feelings left—remorse and love. Let the one kill the other. There is no morality that can stand between us now. I have killed all that. I am a murderer. Will

you leave your husband and come with me? Answer me!"

My hot breath fanned her cheek; I held her so that she could not stir as I awaited her reply. She knew not the whole danger she was in for that moment; but I think she guessed at it. She looked up straight into my eyes.

"No, Mervyn! No! You are not yourself, or you would not ask me. My husband——"

"D—n your husband!" I screamed, beside myself. "Has he killed a father for you?"

"And my child!"

"Your child?"

"Yes. Did you not know—did you not hear? I am a mother, Mervyn."

The softness in her eyes as she pleaded to me—for she was pleading for life, and she knew it—conquered. I dropped her wrists, I tried to cross the room to put some space

between me and that witchery of beauty which drove me mad; but suddenly my sight grew dim, my limbs gave way, and all recollection ceased.

Of course it was nothing but a fainting fit, very naturally caused by the excitement following on my long and enfeebling illness; but it was some time before I was well enough to be taken to my carriage. Lord Monymusk had come in, and prevented any further words between me and Gertrude. He was most civil—the pride of unexpected fatherhood had entirely changed him, had cut his hair, and done away with all his air of savageness. As I left the room, I saw Gertrude's eyes meet his, and I read in them—I think it was almost the bitterest hour of my bitter life—that the child had brought with it at last, to that formerly unnappy household, peace, and that love which lives the longer for its want of passion to wear it out.

* * * * *

Throughout that night I tossed on my pillow, my mind distracted with the thought of whether I should give myself up to justice for the murder I had done. It would involve, perhaps, Gertrude's good name, more certainly my mother's; and yet—the Truth concealed seemed to burn into my vitals and torture my very soul.

Towards morning—as the objects in my room were becoming defined by the early light of day—I solved my difficulty. I tried to pray, but I could not. Prayers were for calmer minds than mine. Then I rose. Yes! There it was, that bright pistol, bought originally to take with me to America, in view of some possible adventures in the Far West. There it was! the cartridges too seemed dry, the action perfect. I snapped it several times before I loaded it.

The determination I had taken was a new life to me. I felt joyous, almost young and hopeful again. I was a prisoner, with the means of escape assured. I laughed—I re-

member how odd that laugh sounded in the stillness—and I raised the muzzle (how cold it was!) to my temple. My favourite old dog, Lion, roused by my movements, came up to me and licked my hand. I leant down to him and laid a kiss upon his forehead. Poor old brute! No one would miss me except him. And then again the cold iron touched my forehead. I would make my start as a race is started! and even as I thought this, a curious jumble of old Ascot and Derby and Newmarket recollections came confusedly into my mind. I seemed again to see Bayley North standing by with the inscrutable smile of his as I booked some especially foolhardy bet. Are you ready? Go! I shouted the last word at the top of my voice, and pulled the trigger.

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NOTE BY LADY O'CONNOR.

My poor son has asked me to jot down the ending of this fragment of his auto-

biography. I do so only on the distinct understanding that it shall be seen by no one until both he and I are gone from this world.

The morning following the day when he first went out after his terrible brain-fever his servant found him lying on the floor in his bedroom, unconscious, with a revolver in his hand. He had been struck with paralysis. The revolver had the hammer down; but, on examination, it was found that the cartridge had not exploded. Speech he did not recover for three weeks, and he has permanently lost the use of his right side. The doctors hold out no hope of his recovery, and indeed say that certain complications, not necessary to detail here, are likely to occur, which may kill him at any time. As soon as he could be moved I persuaded him to come with me to Ballyconor, and there we now reside.

To pass his weary time—for he is afflicted with the most distressing melancholy, al-

though his mind is not, as I once feared it would be, affected by his sorrows—he drew up the foregoing sketch of his life, dictating it to me every evening. Now, however, he has partially lost his power of speech, and therefore I have added this.

He thinks that some day what is set down here may be serviceable to some one, but I do not share his opinion. He has forgiven me my share in the wreck of his life, and we have only one wish, as strong with me as with him, to die and be forgotten.

A CAPITAL MATCH;

AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

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AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

I.

EVERYONE who knew Harry Seyward liked him; and yet few exactly respected him. He was not a man you would choose for a trustee or an executor or a guardian to your children; and, though you would have no hesitation in leaving untold gold in his reach, you might think at least the historical "three times" before putting your name on the back of a blue strip of paper when politely requested by the impecunious young gentleman so to do.

Merry, *insouciant*, and as devoid of principle as it was possible for a so-called honourable man to be, Harry was not an unfair specimen of the genus "Man about town" of this our generation. Good-looking, well-dressed, with a certain aptitude in conversation which narrowly escaped being wit, and with a careless *bonhomie* that was almost geniality, he was petted and made much of both by men and women; and if both sexes knew that when he had got what he wanted from them they were but as squeezed oranges in his sight, yet he squeezed so gently and so pleasantly that no one much objected to the process. Not that he was rapacious either as to money or love. With regard to the first and most necessary of the two articles, when he had he was always willing to give, just as he expected to be given to; but as the want was nearly always on his side—he being the third son of a not over-rich Scotch Peer—the bargain was

not of the fairest. Women he looked upon as the natural prey of man, and he regarded their vain struggles to escape him with the same grim amusement as a cat may feel when toying with an unfortunate mouse, or as the cobra experiences when he surveys the stupefaction of the rabbit which is to serve him as a meal. Unlike some men, however, he could always take a defeat graciously, turning like a lapdog in a shrubbery from the game that was lost to a new quarry with cheerful alacrity; and, above all, no one had ever heard him boast of a success, or say even one word that could assist in smirching the very frailest frisky matron's character.

We have perhaps said enough of him to justify the remark that the acceptance of his hand and heart by Miss Erle, the most substantial heiress of the season of 187—, was rather a risky proceeding. It surprised even himself.

"You'll hate me in a month," he said, twisting his silky moustache as he sat beside her on the sofa, about a week after the announcement of their marriage had set wagging the malicious tongues of Society.

"Shall I, Harry? I hope not," she murmured, a little seriously.

"And I am sure to behave ill. You see, one doesn't get accustomed to a strange state of existence at once; and—and I've never been married before."

"No more have I."

"No, of course not; but then women are all born domesticated; at least—I mean—in a kind of way," he added, remembering a few little experiences of his own that seemed to contradict his axiom.

"I wish they all were," said Ethel Erle, with something like a sigh, perhaps also remembering rumours which had reached her ear of the experiences of her lover.

"And—you see," went on Harry, with

an embarrassment rather strange in him, "I'm rather a harum-scarum sort of fellow; and, in short, Ethel, I like you too well to make you unhappy. Do you understand?"

"Hardly," she said; but she put her little hand into his with a gesture of confidence which was very pretty.

"I mean," and he pulled fiercely at the moustache, "I mean—in short, Ethel, I think we had better not do it."

"Do you mean that you were mistaken in your feelings about me?" she asked, the hand he held trembling.

"Yes."

She withdrew the hand, and her mouth quivered.

"Oh!"

"Yes, Ethel, I was mistaken; I thought I just liked you as I have liked many other girls, and I thought I would try to marry you because I was hard up and you were rich. But I find, dearest, that I

don't like you in that sort of way at all; that you are different from other women; truer, better, less frivolous, less vain; in short, a million times too good for a *vaurien* like me. And, Ethel"—her hand was in his again, and her eyes were full of tears—"I distrust myself so much that I do not feel sure of even the love for you I honestly feel keeping me what I ought to be—what any man you love ought to be. I cannot bear to think that I may cause pain to one like you; that I may bring tears into those pretty eyes; that I should darken your bright life. Darling, we love each other; is not that happiness enough? Why should we spoil our present by bringing in the future of hardness and change? Let me escape the temptation now; give me strength now to go away from you—from you whom I have, brute that I have been, associated with merely to pay for my extravagance; and let me always keep the memory that once I met a pure,

perfect woman, and that she loved me!"

All the answer our heiress made was to lay her brown-tressed head upon his shoulder, murmuring, as she did this indelicate thing, "Oh, Harry, I love you! Let us always be happy together—always together!"

And so the one little bit of real feeling that Harry Seyward had felt since he came from Oxford to take his part in the gay world did not lose him the hand of the great heiress, and did procure him half-an-hour of the purest love-making that he, with all his conquests, had ever experienced. There are few men with a spark of good left in them who do not feel ennobled by the love of an honest, pure woman; like Mercy, such love is twice blessed; it confers a blessing on the giver and the receiver; and something of the hardness which contact with the world brings is rubbed off when the angel attribute of unselfish devotion steps in. Per-

haps only a woman can love with no thought of self. Many an old spinster, living ridiculous among her pet dogs or plethoric cats, has felt within her bosom what the languishing beauties of Courts and their favoured Lotharios would have given years of their life even to know.

So Harry Seyward, flattered and caressed all the more now that he was about to add wealth to his other attributes, for a short time forgot to be pleased with his so-called good luck; was inclined, indeed, to shun the somewhat coarse and plain-spoken congratulations of his acquaintance; to forget all about the money in the Three per Cents. and the place in Northamptonshire, and to remember only, as an all-sufficient happiness, that he was loved by a woman whom he loved in return.

The little billet-doux of numerous frisky ladies anxious to offer him their sympathetic compliments on his at last "ranging" himself; the loud-voiced "bravos" of

his associates at the Clubs, who foresaw much advantage from the enrichment of so generous a fellow; all came like so many shocks to him in a short dream of a kind of happiness he had hitherto despised or ignored; and to not one soul amid his many friends did he dare, for fear of ridicule, to impart the dread secret that he really loved this heiress, who was to pay off his debts; and settle £10,000 a year upon him. And yet she was worthy of a man's love, too. There was something in her character which neither the crafty scheming of her father (now dead, and gone where his banker's-book could not accompany him), nor the interested flattery of a money-worshipping world could spoil. She did care for her wealth, but as it was a means of making others happy; she did care for the pleasure of Society, but she saw the good side of that Society more clearly than the other, being good herself; and, having no *arrières-pensées* in her own

heart, she never made herself wretched by attributing motives to others.

Of course she was well aware that a great part of her popularity came from the fact of her being rich; but she accepted this as one of the inevitable disadvantages of an otherwise pleasant position; and, if it sometimes annoyed and saddened her to witness the readiness with which nine-tenths of her young male friends would sell themselves for money, the thing had its comic side, too, which, having her fair share of a sense of the ridiculous, she could thoroughly appreciate. How she came to fall in love with Harry Seyward was a puzzle to herself, as much as to her friends and the world in general.

"I s'pose it growed," she said to her greatest friend, Miss Delavel, parodying Topsy. "I certainly can give it no accurate parentage. I only know that it exists, and is remarkably strong and healthy. Of course, dear, I know exactly what you all

say; what you, perhaps, have a right to say. He is *not* perfect. But who is? Yes, he is fond of horse-racing; perhaps of what men call 'punting.' They say he threw ever so many mains at hazard the other night, and I suspect the money went to Hancock for that bracelet he gave me this morning. But what then? Simply that if he married a poor wife he would soon be wandering about the Continent in a seedy coat. Fancy Harry in bad clothes! I am sure I shall do him good. It *must* do him good to have money, even if it is only to lose; and don't you think, Clara, that it is possible my love may do him good too. These women he has hitherto flirted with, do you suppose any one of them really cared for him, or does care for him, enough to try to keep him from evil and danger?"

Her voice trembled as she spoke the concluding sentence, and her friend, seeing that it was of no use to prolong the argu-

ment, gave her a kiss and declared she was an angel; which she was, as well as an heiress.

The dignified satisfaction with which the news of Harry's engagement was received by his family may be imagined. It was almost too dignified, and its reasons and modes of showing itself too complex for description by our unpractised pen. The old Earl, whose chief characteristics were a three-times-round necktie and a firm belief that the Liberals were doomed to eternal destruction, naturally hailed the fact that his son had now provided himself with another paymaster. Lady Clackmannan dashed about from one friend's house to another, to "talk it over," until her Ladyship's prancing chestnuts could scarcely drag their legs over the stones; and Viscount Ardrishaig, the elder son, straightway borrowed a "pony" of his lucky relative, in a burst of fraternal affection. It is sad to relate that all this money,

before many months were over, had found its way into the pockets of the minor bookmakers; for the Viscount was an ardent supporter of second-rate racing, and when, at a little country meeting, he had backed a three-legged weed of his own (picked up at some sale for forty guineas) for a five-pound note—having spent many anxious days previously squeezing secrets out of jockeys and good-natured and astute publicans—he was in a state of mysterious and unholy excitement that no owner of a favourite for the Derby could ever hope to emulate.

The Duchess of Stornaway, who was considered the head of the family, and whose opinion in anything relating to it was taken as law by all the Seywards, was graciously pleased to express her satisfaction with the engagement.

"Miss Erle is a lady," said her Grace, "and her mother was a lady, which accounts for it. I only hope her family will

see that the money is properly tied up, so that Harry may not squander it as he has squandered his own."

The Duchess was accustomed to say very severe things concerning her relatives, and this to Harry's own face and before a bevy of the family was perhaps not pleasant; but it was honey compared with her usual remarks, and confirmed the opinion of many present that even her Grace at her ripe years had not been quite proof against the fascinations of her nephew; indeed, the old Duke was accustomed to say, laughing, that she was over head and ears in love with the boy, and that, if she were only twenty-five years younger, he would not have answered for the consequences.

"I only hope those impudent weekly papers will not insert disagreeable paragraphs about it," went on the Duchess. "Of course one does not mind what they say, but it is unpleasant nevertheless.

Can nobody go round and give orders that nothing is to be put in?"

None of the family present seemed to be in a position which justified their professing the possession of such power as this; but eventually something was done, and beyond a fierce wrangle between the *Pimlico Pryer* and the *Belgravian Wasp* as to the exact amount of Miss Erle's fortune, and a slight difference between the *Beau Monde* and the *Aristocratic Review* (the latter a paper just started by an enterprising bootmaker who made exquisite uncreaking footmen's shoes) about the colour of the young lady's hair and the Christian name of her maid, with an offshoot of contention as to the usual food of her pug, very little was said in the weekly "journals of Society" that could vex the soul of even so particular a person as the Duchess of Stornaway.

And so, in the height of the season, when people, who had by a law of their

own making come from their cool houses in the flowery country, were making every excuse for hurrying as often as possible from the hot streets to a spurious country life of polo and lawn-tennis and tea-garden flirtation; when senators mopped their brows and made speeches, and used much ingenuity to escape the visits of curious and perspiring constituents; when far into the night yawning coachmen sat in line waiting for the hour of release to come for their yawning mistresses; when dandies from our Army, irreverently yclept "Spring Captains," sauntered moodily down Piccadilly, wishing they knew some one in a carriage to take their hats off to; when linkmen began to think that life after all was just endurable, with somewhat of beer and skittles therein—in the height of the London season, we say, Harry Seyward was, at St. George's Church, united in the bonds of holy matrimony to Ethel, only daughter of the late Mark Erle, Esq., of

Lombard Street, and of Greyton Towers, Northamptonshire.

There is no rose, alas! without a thorn; and even as Lord Clackmannan was reading the announcement in the *Times* over his breakfast next morning, to assure himself once more that his wheedling son would no longer come to him for an addition to his allowance, he received a blow from which his refined nature recoiled.

There, alongside of the rose, was the sharp-pointed thorn. "No cards." The arrangements in this respect had been left to the Erle family, and here was the result! It is gratifying to be able to record that, notwithstanding this taint of vulgarity thus grafted, as it were, on the tree of his son's prosperity, the Earl was able to tie his tie with his accustomed regularity, and none but a very close observer could have remarked the slight sign of nervous trepidation he evinced for the next few

days whenever any mention of the wedding was made in his hearing.

As to Lady Clackmannan, she wrote furious letters to the editor of the *Times* and the Erle delinquent who was responsible for this breach of etiquette. We fear the first of these letters, splendid monogram and all, joined many plebeian effusions in the monster waste-paper basket in Printing House Square; but the second was more successful, and formed the commencement of a very pretty quarrel, which bade fair to keep any of Mrs. Harry's relatives from troubling the Clackmannan *ménage* in Tilney Street, and gave her Ladyship an immense amount of amusement in the way of epistolatory controversy.

The happy pair (oh! hackneyed phrase, which must so often have read to those principally concerned as a bitter sneer at the lie they have just registered before

Heaven and man!) went off to a pretty place of the Duke's within driving distance of London; and there we must leave them for the time of their honeymoon—mysterious fortnight which bachelors consider with an awe that vainly takes refuge in assumed sarcasm, and which married men look back upon with such mixed feelings, so often, alas! with regret; for in whose book of life are there not many pages which he would gladly blot out or rewrite?

A solemn time that honeymoon, let comic scribblers say what they please. When two human hearts attempt to open their secrets to each other; when often it comes to one or other of a linked together pair that a hideous mistake has been made, and that what promised to be a life of roses and summer skies is fated to be but a sad dark winter of discontent, silent endurance, and regret.

II.

Not much time had elapsed after the auspicious day when—

> "The men admired the happy maid,
> The maids the happy man,"

at St. George's, Hanover Square, before Ethel Seyward began in her inmost heart, and sorely against her will, to realize the terrible fact that she had made a mistake. Not that she was unhappy as yet, only the belief in a stratum of solid goodness and real rectitude of purpose existing in Harry Seyward's character—though overlaid with an immense amount of frivolity and worldliness—seemed after all to have been a delusion. Little speeches of his were perpetually jarring upon her nerves; little glimpses of his utterly unprincipled rule of life, whose motto was: "In a world of liars he lives best who lies best." She did not believe the world was one of liars; and surely, she sometimes thought to her-

self, Harry's experience of her, his own wife, might have a little improved his scornfully cynical opinion of women *en masse*.

"You're an exception, my love," he said to her on one occasion, when she gave voice to this feeling—"a brilliant, magnificent exception; a diamond in a dust-heap; the exception that proves the rule. Surely a man who found a swan among his geese would be a fool if for the rest of his days he took all his geese to be swans. Though, by the way, I'd rather have a goose than a swan."

"I'm *not* an exception, Harry," she declared, rather hotly, "and I hate to hear you say such things. We are not all bad—men or women either; but we require to be looked at fairly, and without blurring prejudices. Even the sun looks distorted seen through bad glass."

"And you're my sun, dear; and I shall always look at you with the naked eye, until

I am old and decrepit, when only the best spectacles shall be used."

"Do be serious, Harry."

"Serious in the honeymoon! What profanation! I'd as soon whistle at a funeral."

"Can you not think there is more good than bad in the world?" she asked, rather sadly; for, lightly as he spoke, and unimportant as the talk might seem, a great part of the happiness of her life seemed to be slipping away from her in the awakening of this honeymoon.

"With you at my side, of course I can. Without you, Ethel, I fear I should fall back into my old habits of thought. I told you what I was, you know; and you took me, like a buyer at Tattersall's, without a warranty. I can't be returned if unsound or vicious, dear. That's the rule of the yard."

Ethel sighed. She was somewhat serious-minded. And his levity, which

seemed ceaseless, annoyed and saddened her.

Truly they were an ill-matched couple; yet they had love to bind them together still. When that link wore out and snapped—and how often is it a weak, ill-made chain?—it did not require a very penetrating eye to foresee storms on the horizon of their domestic life.

And—nestled in a lovely little house in Park Street, surrounded by luxuries of doubtful taste and certain value, living in a comfort that her early days certainly never foreshadowed, waited a little lady with big black eyes, who was well accustomed to—

"Ride the whirlwind and direct the storm"

that shattered the fears of so many fair-seeming homes. She waited with determined eyes and angry purpose in her small, resolute mouth, until such time as the Seyward mansion in Prince's Gate

might open its hospitable doors to the friends of its master and mistress.

Amid his many flirtations perhaps none had been more serious—and in some ways more annoying—to Harry Seyward than that which he had carried on for some two years, in full light of day, with Mrs. Mirrables. She was so pretty and so inconstant that it was some credit to him to have for so long a time the privileged *entrée* to the little house in Park Street; but her reign was unfortunately prolonged into the days when Ethel's fortune hung so temptingly before him; and the persistence with which she insisted on ignoring any feeling on his part towards his *fiancée*, save that of pecuniary interest, was embarrassing; for he had not the courage to break with the old love, nor to lay bare before her cutting sarcasm the actual fact of his affection for the "big woman from the city," as Lola Mirrables persisted in calling Ethel. But women are quick

enough to detect those little matters, and the little lady of Park Street knew well enough what was passing in her faithless admirer's mind, and hated and despised him heartily for his cowardice.

None the less, of course, did she determine to resume her temporarily abrogated sway; and this time the pleasure of having Harry Seyward at her feet would carry with it also the intense enjoyment to be gained by the mischief it would cause.

So that, when the happy pair, having duly done their month of treacle, came back to London, Mrs. Mirrables was one of their first visitors, and played her part so well that when she left the house Harry had to listen to a great deal of praise from his wife of a lady who—well, who was not generally a great favourite with wives who loved their husbands.

One of Ethel's characteristics was an absolute refusal to accept the verdict of the world without some slight investiga-

tion of her own, and the cruel things that people said of Mrs. Mirrables vanished into thin air before her pretty confiding ways and innocent acknowledgments of folly which ill-natured people *would* construe into something worse.

"You see," she said one day to Ethel, "I have had such hard cards to play all my life, and I can't help liking a little society and amusement. I often wish I had been born ugly! But I have this consolation, that, whatever the world may say, John knows I am to be trusted."

John was her husband, the meekest man that ever married woman, and whose literary studies totally precluded him from sharing in the fashionable amusements of his frisky wife.

"Do you think I *ought* to go and spend every day with him in the British Museum reading-room? I believe they admit women, only you're not allowed to speak. If you think I ought, dear, I really will."

"No, Lola dear," said Ethel, smiling at the other's pretty earnestness—they had got to calling each other by their Christian names by this time—"no, I don't think you are required to do that. And, as far as I am concerned, you may make your mind easy. I never believe ill-natured stories, and I listen to them as little as possible."

"You are so good. If you knew how lonely and unhappy I am sometimes in Park Street! How I long for a friend like you!"

Ethel was not demonstrative, nor did she like demonstrativeness in others; but she returned the clasp of the other's hand, and said very kindly, as Lola repressed a sob—

"Come here whenever you like, dear. You will generally find me at home alone in the morning, and between six and seven. I don't like the idea of your being unhappy, with no one to talk to. Surely

Mr. Mirrables is not *all* day and every day at the British Museum?"

"Not quite; but when he is at home he shuts himself up in his study and no one dare enter. He hasn't come into the dining-room now for ever so long."

Mrs. Mirrables forgot to mention that the poor man had received long ago strict orders never to dare to violate the sanctity of the exquisitely artistic little room where she received her visitors; but perhaps it escaped her memory.

And so, rather to the astonishment of "the world," and very much to that of her husband, Ethel struck up a decided friendship for the woman who was perhaps the most unlike her of all the women in London town; and many cynics were amused and a little mystified to see the care with which Lola conducted herself when in the earshot of her friend, imitating her somewhat slow and solemn way of speaking and her dignified carriage

with infinite humour, when two or three men were congregated together in the little room in Park Street.

Gradually Harry began to find this friendship very convenient, and forgot to inquire too closely into its cause. He resumed—in a mild, but pleasant manner—his interrupted flirtation with Lola; and she, being a woman of excellent tact, was always ready to come to Prince's Gate whenever her services were required to fill the void occasioned by his absence at his club—or elsewhere.

For—it is a sad story—already, before the first season had waned, her husband had begun to seek after other gods than the beautiful deity he had set up at home; and, perhaps for the sake of contrast, perhaps, as the Yankees say, out of sheer "cussedness," he sought for objects of worship in those among women who were not worthy to black the shoes of his wife.

He became the most constant frequenter of the "Bouffe" Theatre. There he made great friends with the manager, giving him exquisite little repasts at his club, and even going so far as to introduce him to Prince's Gate. This manager was a pleasant dog enough, and could sing you an excellent song after putting a magnum of champagne under his belt; but perhaps the presence at the "Bouffe" of Miss Nettie Vender may have had something to to do with Harry's sudden predilection for that theatre.

III.

NETTIE VENDER, as she called herself, was pretty and bewitching enough to excuse a good deal. She was not vulgar, yet she had a decidedly ready wit; she was always more or less refined, even when refinement seemed scarcely required by her surroundings; and there was a certain mystery

about her origin, and also about her income, which was rather captivating. No one knew exactly what nation she belonged to. She spoke broken English and doubtful French, but spoke both languages easily and prettily. Some said she was Dutch, but there was a general disinclination among her admirers to admit the truth of this theory, in that their ideas of Dutch women were of the thick-waisted, web-footed kind. But, whatever she was, there was no kind of doubt about the fact that wherever she went, whether to Paris, or Vienna, or London, or even stolid Berlin, she turned the heads of a great many male persons, even of very illustrious and high-titled male persons. Her singing was only just not good enough to entitle her to a place amid the stars of the Opera, but her acting, especially in light comedy and in opera bouffe, was simply perfection; and the agitation among the young dandies in the stalls whenever she showed her merry

face and lissome figure on the other side of the footlights was extreme.

No wonder, when that enterprising *impresario*, Mr. Happykopf, engaged her at his splendid new theatre in Piccadilly, that the stage-door was nightly besieged by a mob of cigar-smoking, white-tied youths, evidently impressed with the belief that, on her way to her neat brougham some night, she would suddenly—*à la* Queen of Spain—cast the eye of affection on one or other of their number. Ingenuous youths! She would as soon have requested the dirtiest super who took his hat off to her as he opened her carriage-door, to step into it and come home to supper, as have spoken to the most generously amatory amongst them without a formal introduction. But they only loved her the more for the scornful manner in which she swept by them, and continued to enjoy the pleasures of hope each night over their cigars outside the "Bouffe" stage-door.

It may well be imagined that Harry Seyward did not form one of this expectant group. No. In a very short time he was hail-fellow-well-met with the manager, who introduced him to Mr. Happykopf, the proprietor, who asked him to a little party on the banks of the Thames, where he was presented to the actress of the day.

And then he fell—or deemed that he fell—straightway in love with her, but kept this fact—or assumed fact—to himself, and made her laugh as few of her admirers, even those with illustrious names, ever did, and speedily became on friendly terms with her, and received permission to call upon her in Bayswater.

And now Lola Mirrables's presence in Prince's Gate became especially desirable; for never had he met a woman with whom the time flew more quickly and more pleasantly than with the witty, pretty, worthless actress. There was, in a sense, a freshness about her which charmed the *blasé*

intriguer, an utter absence of the littleness he generally met in women, and a bold disregard for all laws, human or divine—not assumed, as his partly was, but real and almost unconscious, which filled him with a respect that had a little awe in it.

She did not fall in love, or pretend to fall in love, with him.

"You are a good comrade, *mon ami*, and do not bore me, or make love to me, or bother me with presents which I don't want, like most of them. Come and see me as often as you like, or, at least (I forgot), as often as you are allowed."

"Allowed!"

"Yes. 'Allowed,' *Monsieur le mari.*"

He had not got deep enough yet to care about his domestic arrangements being discussed by her, so did not pursue the subject, but lit a cigar absently, wondering whether he could make this indifferent, *insouciante* little creature change her tone; for he was far from satisfied with his

position as regarded her, and certainly desired that her house should be to him something more than a delicious club, where he could smoke and say anything he pleased. For he met many people there; men mostly, but nearly all amusing and clever; nearly all people who had done something, or were about to do something, or could do something if they pleased. They were not what our novelists call "Bohemians." Bohemianism is another name for laziness allied to dirt, and generally associated with failure. They comprised every nation under the sun, and the Babel of sounds in the Bayswater room was sometimes terrific. Nettie had a joke and a smile for each; and perhaps some great ladies—moving uneasily about their crowded *salons*, wondering why that lion or this lioness didn't come or won't roar, or whether Royalty is going to be faithless, after all—might have taken a lesson from the Bouffe actress, as she roved saucy and

piquante from one chattering group to another.

Sunday was her great day for reception, when the Bayswater neighbours were much scandalised at the sounds they heard, the laughter and song and secular music, even —so it was darkly whispered at the Rector's tea-table—even on more than one occasion the sound of dancing feet.

It was not a new world for Seyward, for he had seen most of what there was to see during his ten years "about town," but it was the most perfect specimen of easy-going theatrical life he had ever come across, and his vanity made him keenly alive to the fact that it was a life very few of his associates could hope to enter, and that he was gradually, thanks to his *aplomb*, his good looks, and a certain cynical humour he possessed, becoming rather a prominent person in the Bayswater set.

It may be easily proved, by the aid of applied mathematics, that the oftener he

went to Nettie Vender's the oftener he left his wife alone; and our readers may perhaps be prepared for the statement that that lady did not grow happier as the days went on.

Of course she heard whispers as to the cause of her husband's frequent absence; of course kind friends took care to plant daggers of condolence in her heart; but she was too proud to make a sign either to the world that grinned and promised itself a little amusement, or to the man who was breaking her heart for the gratification of his passing vanity.

As to Nettie Vender herself, wives were so common an appendage to the gentlemen who came and threw themselves at her feet, that it never flashed across her that, simply to pass away an idle hour, she might be working a great wrong to a fellow-creature. Let us do her the justice to say that, had she suspected the real state of affairs, she would have slammed

her door in Mr. Seyward's face with very little compunction or regret.

IV.

"I REALLY think we ought to go to Greyton, Harry; I have all sorts of things to look after there, and have been away a long time. There are the schools and——"

"Oh, bother the schools! Can't you send them a cheque, and tell the little beggars to learn, and be hanged to them?"

"No; I don't think that is a good way of looking after people. And they are all very fond of me there, Harry. Do come down to Greyton for a fortnight at least."

"I detest the country when there is no hunting. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll come down with you next week, and see you comfortably settled—and—and then I'll just come back here, and do Brighton, and Lewes, and Egham, and one or two other race meetings about here—

then run on to Paris with two or three other fellows who want me to go—come back for Doncaster, and then join you at Greyton for the partridge-shooting."

"*I* don't shoot partridges," said Mrs. Seyward, with a touch of sarcasm. "But surely you don't mean really you wish to be away from me so long?"

"Really, my dear Ethel, we mustn't act like a couple of babies. You have your amusements with your model schools and workmen's clubs, and churches, and curates, and things; and I am fond of racing and such like. Let us go our own ways, and it will be all the nicer when we meet."

"But why go to Paris?"

"Oh! hang it, must one account for every whim? I haven't been to Paris for ever so long; and one ought to see the Exhibition."

"I thought you said the Exhibition was only a huge shop, and that you hated look-

ing into shop windows. But that was when *I* wanted to go."

"Well, come now; and I'll give up Brighton and Lewes."

"I *must* go to Northamptonshire now, Harry."

"There! You see how everything has to give way to your plans. Well, that's settled—you go to Greyton and I join you there in six weeks' or a month's time."

Ethel subdued with difficulty a silly desire to sob which seized her—for, mind you, she was still in love with this man—hesitated for a moment while he impatiently twirled his moustache, and then agreed to his plan.

Lola Mirrables's letter to her, when she was alone, amid her scheme for doing good in the country, was scarcely comforting.

"My poor angel," she wrote, "it is all as I feared. He was one of the party with that vile woman at the Grand Hotel at

Brighton, and went with her in her carriage to the races each day. And they say *they are going to Paris together*, but this I will not believe. I think you are wrong to be so proud. Perhaps even now a line from you, promising forgiveness of the past, and explaining that you will be more —what shall I say?—more amenable to his wishes in future, might bring him back."

But to write such a letter never could have been possible to Ethel. Her pride, like most pride, had its bad side. She was the wronged one; no one should ever know what she suffered, not even he if he did become cured of his madness; but nothing, not even the temptation of being happy again by his side, would force her to abate one jot of her dignity. To be left for an actress! The thought was fearfully galling to her; but she at least would not assist him to see the difference.

Let him find it out for himself; and if he did not find it out—well, better her heart than her pride should be broken.

When Harry Seyward found that his having his own way brought no epistolary reproaches upon him he congratulated himself on what he considered his timely firmness.

"If two ride a horse one must ride behind," he said to himself. "Had I given way now as to my liberty of action I should have put on the chain myself. She is a dear good woman, and I shall be delighted to see her again. In the meantime——"

"What are you thinking of? You are as grave as an owl," cried the merry voice of Nettie Vender, coming into the room. "I have news for you. They want me to play in Vienna and to go to-morrow. Carl and Alphonse are coming—will you also?"

He hesitated for a moment. Partridge-shooting had begun now, and he had

heard there was a good show of birds at Greyton. Besides, he had almost fixed the day of his arrival in his last letter to Ethel.

"Ah, I forgot you are a domestic animal! Better you should go home like a good boy."

"Don't be a fool, Nettie! Of course I'll come; at any rate, to throw you a bouquet the first night."

"And, madame—what will she say?"

"Madame is very happy with her churches and parsons," he made answer, admiring Nettie's exquisite toilette, "and you know I don't count for much in such company."

"You are a vile, heartless wicked man, and shall take me for a whole morning's shopping as a punishment! Is the Victoria come round?"

V.

HAPPY! Ethel sat out in the flower-

garden at Greyton, waiting to hear the first sound of the wheels of the carriage that had gone to fetch her husband from the station. She was dressed in the colour he had said he liked, and which she knew—for, for his sake, she could be a little vain—became her well. A faint flush was upon her cheeks, which had grown pale of late, and her eyes were soft, with the tears of forgiveness very near to them.

The train has passed that should bring the truant home! At last! There is the carriage! She can scarcely resist a desire to run forward to meet it, a proceeding which would have shocked the servants, whose admiration for their stately mistress was not unmixed with awe. But she sits still, grasping the woodwork of the garden chair with both hands. But what is this? There is some mistake! The carriage dashes past the hall-door and disappears round the turn to the stables. "Oh, of course—very natural—men often like to

get out at the back-door of a house." So she reasons with herself, but can sit still no longer, and enters the house by the garden window. It seems an age before she hears an outer door open, and breathlessly, in vain trying to be dignified amid her yearning love, she stands waiting for him to enter. Her door opens, and the butler appears. "Your master has arrived?" she asks, with outward calmness, but with a galloping heart. "No, ma'am. The carriage didn't wait, as there is no other train till half-past nine. Is it to go again?" She says "Yes," and sits down with a sick feeling of despair at her heart. She has waited so long, so patiently. But he may come by the next train. He probably had more things to do in London than he expected.

She is making a fool of herself. What man ever did come by the train he meant to come by? But when, a few hours later, she received a telegram, "Am obliged

to go on to Vienna. Will write from there," she completely broke down; and the second footman, a respectable youth with decently strong nerves, declared that evening in the servants' hall that it quite "gave him a turn, like," to enter the sitting-room with coals and find his mistress lying prone upon the floor.

And her maid, when she had been put to bed, declared that she had known it would happen from the first, and that she only wished all men—excluding probably the butler, to whom she had been affianced for some years—could have one neck, and she the hanging of 'em.

VI.

HARRY SEYWARD did come home at last, but, after his gay wanderings and erratic life in such places as Paris and Vienna, the even-going quiet and monotony of Greyton was unbearable to him. And his

wife's calm, rather serious manner chafed and annoyed him. Nettie Vender was, he said to himself, much more agreeable and easy to get on with of the two, and it raised a sort of queer indignation in his mind that he should have to guard his tongue and be careful of his stories, to be discreet as to his tobacco and to wipe his shoes, with his own wife, while with others he could smoke, swear, tell doubtful stories, and dirty the carpet as he pleased. The worst of it was that the more he showed he was bored, the less did his wife try to amuse him. Every yawn of his was a wound to her affections, as well as to her pride; and his casual allusions to his past amusements did not make matters better. So the breach between the two widened day by day, until his frequent absences in town—on business, he said—were almost a relief even to her. Yet she suffered horribly, for Fate, in its usual perverse fashion, had ordained that his very in-

difference should somehow feed the flame of her affection. Some steady-minded philosophic people tell you that affection cannot exist without respect. What a fallacy this is we can easily read in the History of Love. The two feelings are far as the poles asunder in most cases; for one is blind, and the other most intensely strong in its visual organs.

Ethel Seyward only knew that—with or without reason—she did love this disreputable, ungrateful husband of hers, and would give almost her soul to win him back to his allegiance. She had that kind of natural haughtiness (which depends more on education and temperament than blue blood) which forbade her to believe he could in real earnest prefer an actress—a painted playing thing—to herself. It was a madness and a curable madness, degrading to him and to her while it lasted, but not really affecting the solid link that was between them two, more

than the antics of a temporary lunatic have to do with his action in his hours of sanity.

And, poor woman, she did her very best to amuse him, but it was to amuse him in her own way that she tried. It seemed impossible to her that he could actually take no interest whatever in her plans for doing good to all around her; in her pretty church, her skilfully-planned workman's club, her village flower-shows, and her clean and intelligent school-children. It was only part of his madness not now to care for such things, and she must not cease insisting on their beauty and interest. So the more he was bored the more she bored him; indeed, the more he resented it the more sternly did she resolve to continue the practice.

VII.

WINTER gradually drew to a close. The house in Prince's Gate glowed afresh under

its new coat of paint, while, inside, the furniture rejoiced at being taken out of the dull brown holland coverings, and soon carriages came rolling up to the front door, depositing cards for Mr. and Mrs. Seyward, who, it was rumoured, were to entertain largely this season.

"Thank God we are out of that infernal Greyton!" exclaimed Harry, throwing himself into a chair in the drawing-room just after their arrival.

"I don't think you were very much there, Harry," said his wife. "Most of your winter was spent in the train to London and back, it seems to me."

"Well, *that* wasn't amusing.

"You needn't have done it. There was plenty to amuse you at Greyton."

"There wasn't a thing, my dear. You see, I am, as I have often told you, a town mouse. I want streets, and noise, and people I know all about me, and my Club, and——"

"And your theatre."

"Well, yes; at least, if there is a decent actor or actress in it."

"I hope some theatre now answers your expectations," she said, turning a little white.

"No. I think I shall run over to Paris for a week or so. They tell me there are some capital plays there, and it rubs up one's French. Besides, London isn't half aired yet. I hate the place during the time when people insist on shaking hands with you and asking when you came back. I'll get you an Easter egg in Paris, Ethel."

"They make them just as well in London," said Mrs. Seyward, turning away with something like a sigh.

When he had lounged out, cigarette in mouth, looking, as his deluded wife thought, very handsome in his careless laziness, she took up the *Times* and looked down the list of theatrical advertisements. As she expected, the name of Mlle. Vender

was not there; but, just as she was putting down the paper, her eye lit upon this paragraph:—

"London playgoers will be disappointed to hear that Mlle. Vender, whose acting took the town by storm last season, has been engaged for a period of six months by M. X——, of the —— Theatre, Paris. The gifted artiste's success," &c., &c.

Harry's sudden dislike to London before Easter was now easily explainable, and she was not much surprised when, a few days afterwards, he suddenly had his portmanteau packed, told her to write to him at the Grand Hotel, and departed, leaving her alone to amuse herself returning the cards of the good persons who wished to be invited to such festivities as might take place in Prince's Gate. And very much alone she felt; far more so than amid her more serious occupations in Northamptonshire.

There is no such weary work as gaiety

when the heart is not gay; and a thumb-screw is scarcely a more unpleasant thing to wear than a conventional grin under such circumstances. Nevertheless for a time she played her part bravely enough, trying to shut her ears to the rumours that came fast from across the Channel—rumours which said that Mr. Seyward had cast aside all decency, and was openly—nay, ostentatiously—casting his money into the lap of the siren of the —— Theatre.

"He is ruining himself, and you, too, my dear," said little Mrs. Mirrables, with crocodile tears in her soft, purring voice. "It is not fair. There should be a line drawn somewhere, even in Paris. Her carriages, which he provides, are the talk of the Bois. I forget what the last pearl necklace that he gave her cost—something fabulous. They say that he even talks of withdrawing her from the theatre. You really must do something."

Mrs. Mirrables was the only human being

whom Ethel permitted to discuss this affair. Perhaps it was necessary for her to have some one to whom she could speak of what was always in her thoughts.

"Something! What can I do?"

"You ought not to bear his treatment."

"How can I help bearing it?"

"Resent it."

"How?"

"Take a leaf out of his book."

"Lola!"

"Oh! I don't mean *really*—I——No! Of course I don't mean that, Ethel, so you needn't look so proud and offended. No! Of course there is nothing for it but to submit; and when he has got tired of Mlle. Vender, welcome him back as if nothing had happened. Only this plan hasn't quite answered hitherto."

Ethel said nothing, and soon changed the conversation with an imperious air which always angered Mrs. Mirrables, but to which that scheming little lady thought it

prudent to submit. What her scheme just at present was she would have found it difficult clearly to define; only one thing was clear—the breach between this couple must be made as wide as possible. There was little fear of the actress mania lasting very long, she thought; the grand thing to provide against was a recurrence of the domesticity mania, which, to do him justice, had not afflicted our dandy husband for very long.

But before she took her departure, to hurry back to her piteous solitude—where, by the way, she generally received about a dozen men between the hours of five and seven—Ethel said:

"What did you mean, Lola, about—about my resenting it?"

"Oh, nothing."

"But you did mean something. You said I might take a leaf——"

"Out of his book; but then I was speaking thoughtlessly. You could not do it,

even though it meant nothing, and even if it were certain to bring him to his senses. You're too good for him, my love; that's where it is. Goodness bores some men. And I think it's catching. Since I have known you, the one or two young men I sometimes allow to call on me yawn horribly; and I do my best to amuse them—always tell them of my husband's last find in the British Museum."

Ethel did not listen to the latter part of this speech, which was perhaps lucky for the continuance of her faith in Mrs. Mirrables' candour; and, when she was left alone, sat for a long time immersed in thought, going upstairs eventually to dress for dinner with a very determined look upon her pale face.

VIII.

Mr. Seyward sat before his writing-table in his sitting-room on the first floor in the

Grand Hotel, pen in hand, but seemed to have much difficulty in putting it to paper. He was writing to ask his wife to send him some money; and it must be admitted that such a letter was a little awkward to frame.

A very large sum had been settled on him, and it seemed almost necessary to account for his wanting more, and to account for it without palpable falsehood. He could scarcely hope that no rumours of his life in the gay city had reached Ethel's ears; and, let a wife be as patient as she may, she is apt to dislike being asked to pay for presents to another woman. Yet creditors were pressing, and Nettie was insatiable. To refuse her one whim was, he felt, to lose her for ever; for were not a Russian prince, a Swedish banker, and a Parisian stock-jobber all ready, purse in hand, to supplant him at the first opportunity?

He vowed to himself that the pecunious

trio should be disappointed yet, and dipped his pen in the ink again—

"My dear Ethel,

"I have been deuced unlucky at baccarat lately. Can you let me have credit at the bank for a few thousands? Of course I will put it right very soon, as indeed I have nothing to complain of as to your great generosity. I'm rather in a fix just now. Five thou. would do capitally, and then I can square up here and be back with you in London very soon. Do you know, I am beginning to think town life is rather a mistake after all, and shall be glad when we find ourselves at dear old Greyton. With much love (in great haste, as the post is going),

"Your affectionate husband,

"Harry."

Not a bad letter, he thought, and not so very untrue after all. He would like to go to Greyton; he would like to get out of the

bustle of Paris and a life of excitement—if it were not for Nettie Vender's saucy smile.

The answer came by return of post:—

"My dear Harry,

"You can draw for £1,000 at the bank. I would say more, but, unfortunately, I have been spending a great deal of money, too, lately—and am hard up, too.

"I'm just off to Maidenhead—so good-bye.

"Yours affectionately,

"Ethel.

"P.S.—I don't quite agree with you about Greyton. It seems to me we were as dull as ditch-water there. Very possibly I may go abroad with Lady Barsaker and a party she is getting together at the end of the season. So don't alter your plans at all for me."

She, who was so careful, so absurdly

careful, he had thought, about money matters, hard up! It was astounding! And talking of going abroad with Lady Barsaker and "a party she is getting up!" Lady Barsaker, the fastest of a set that Ethel had always held in detestation! Harry pulled his moustache in profound perplexity, and was so dull that evening that Miss Vender began seriously weighing the comparative merits of the Prince, the banker, and the stock-jobber.

Then a few days afterwards he read in the papers of a grand midnight out-of-door party given by the Cremorne Club, and in the list of the Ladies' Committee there was his wife's name! Some kind friend, too, sent him a copy of the *Pimlico Pryer*, with a pencil-mark in the margin opposite this paragraph:—

"Harry, mon cher, two can play at that game. You had better come home to your chimney-corner before it is quite full and there is no room for any more. In

heaven's name give the lady one grand parting present, and do not let us be shocked on both sides of the Channel at the same time. Did you ever hear of the boy who tried to sit on two stools at once?"

It certainly was very puzzling. Ethel's letters, which had been, if sad and short, pretty regular, had ceased entirely; and, were it not for the fashionable intelligence, and an occasional letter from a friend, he would not have known whether she was still in London or not.

But at last, as a climax to the whole mystery, came a huge envelope, ornamented with the gorgeous monogram affected by the Duchess of Stornaway, who had only written to him once before in her life, and that was to congratulate him on his engagement to the heiress.

Thus ran the missive :—

"My dear Harry,

"The Duke and I have been

speaking of you this morning, and he thinks it well that I should write you a line to beg you to return at once to London. I will not ask what has kept you so long away, nor blame you for such extraordinary proceedings as remaining *months* at an hotel in Paris, while your wife is entertaining in London, for I detest scandal, and I am not fond of scolding; but I will say that, unless you do return now, you will show yourself lost to all sense of decency and of respect for your name or family.

"Your presence by your wife's side is absolutely required to stop what ill-natured people here are saying of her. Although I have been *terribly disappointed* in her character, which I thought so *very different*, I will not put the whole blame of what has happened upon her. She is young and handsome, and fond of Society, and you—you insist on remaining in Paris and behaving as if you were unmarried. Do not

be so mad as to reject my advice. Remember, you have a family and a name to think of, and come home at once.

"Your affectionate aunt,

"ANNE STORNAWAY."

"The whole blame of what has happened!" What had happened, and how could any blame attach to her? "Fond of Society!" What was the stupid old Duchess thinking of? Nevertheless, it certainly behoved him to go and see what all this meant; and that very night he announced to Mademoiselle Vender that he was recalled to London on business.

And as he came without that tiara she had set her heart upon, and she happened to be in a bad temper for other reasons—the applause the night before having been decidedly less vehement than usual—she made up her mind on the spot to depose him and to set up the Russian Prince in his stead.

Harry Seyward, flying down to Calais by the night mail, never dreamed that he was one of those unfortunate beings—a monarch without a crown.

IX.

THE butler at Prince's Gate was too good a servant ever to be taken by surprise, and helped his master to divest himself of his great-coat on arrival in the grey dawn—a telegram having preceded him over-night—with his usual solemn urbanity. Nevertheless, in his heart of hearts, Mr. Popkins was very much astounded by a good many things just then—by his master's sudden arrival not more than by certain strange proceedings on the part of his mistress, and by the mysterious behaviour of late adopted by her maid, to whom it may be remembered the worthy man was affianced.

"Mrs. Seyward not up yet, I suppose?"

"Not come home yet, sir."

"Not come home! Where from?"

"There was a 'bal masky' at the Hurleyburley Club at Richmond last night, and Mrs. Seyward said she thought she'd be late."

Harry's astonishment showed itself by a low whistle.

"Late! well, it is rather late. Get me some breakfast, Popkins."

"Yes, sir. Beg pardon, sir," went on the man, glancing through the hall window, "but here is the carriage come back, sir."

There was a thundering rap at the door close to his head, and Harry involuntarily drew back as it opened and there entered —an apparition! His wife, dressed in a classical costume which—well, which might have suited Nettie Vender in opera-bouffe, and which, whatever its quality, was not very much for quantity—with her chestnut locks streaming

"Like a meteor to the troubled air,"

her eyes glowing apparently with the recollections of past excitement, and—wonder of wonders!—with distinct patches of rouge upon either cheek. She turned at the entrance of the hall, and her husband then perceived that a fine gentleman, splendidly costumed as a Charles II. dandy, was getting out of the carriage after her.

"Get in again, Jack!" she cried, "they'll take you home. Thomas, go to Captain Carkey's lodgings in Jermyn Street. Good night."

Then the carriage, with the cavalier therein, drove away, the hall door banged to, and Mrs. Seyward swept across the hall without perceiving that her husband was standing there, dumb with astonishment. At last, just as she reached the stairs, he found his voice.

"Ethel——"

"Oh, you have come back?" she said,

with careless good-humour. "How are you? Not rough crossing, I hope? I shan't get up till the afternoon, and I dine with Lady Barsaker. Pity you didn't let me know you were coming back, or I could have arranged for you to come too."

And, with a little nod, she went up to her room, humming to herself an air from the very opera in which Nettie Vender had first made herself famous in London.

X.

"My dear Lola, you *must* be able to tell me something to explain this mystery."

"My dear Harry, there is no mystery, except in your imagination, and, if there were, I don't see why you should expect me to be able to explain it."

"No mystery in my wife—the quietest woman in England, as I thought—suddenly becoming rackety, fast, talked of, vulgar, over, or under, dressed (I scarcely

know which expresses it)—a friend of Lady Barsaker, her name coupled with that of Jack Carkey, compared with whom I am an angel of light. No mystery!"

"Precious little!" exclaimed Mrs. Mirrables, with that servants'-hall slang which is now so much affected upstairs. "Your wife, like a good many wives, was in love, or thought she was in love, with her husband; her husband, like a good many husbands, thought he would go and gather roses elsewhere, keeping all the time the little rose at home for his very own; and the little rose at home found that there were people besides her roving husband who were fond of roses other than those which legally belonged to them, and, like a sensible rose, didn't choose to waste her sweetness upon a husband's empty chair. There isn't a bit of mystery in it. It's only another case of the biter bit."

"But I never did bite, Lola."

"No," she said, with rather a scornful flash of her eyes. "No, but you barked a great deal, and this time you have barked your shins. Don't look so glum, man. Surely you don't mind? Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and it would have been an insult to your teaching and example if your wife had stuck to her schools and parsons."

"I'm not glum, Lola. Why should I be glum? Only I can't understand it. She was so—so exactly the sort of woman who couldn't do these things."

"So unlike me, eh?"

"Well, there wasn't much resemblance, and how you became friends is another mystery."

"Extremes meet, Mr. Seyward."

"Surely your influence could not——"

"*My* influence! Good heaven, Henry, I believe you are a fool! Do you think I could have any influence over this stiff-starched woman?"

"Stiff, is she, and starched? I think Jack Carkey——"

"Jack's a very nice fellow, and you needn't abuse him. I intended—no matter—our dear Ethel has cut me out. And I certainly can *not* call her stiff and starched now."

"Though she is to me. I wonder whether a woman's brain——"

"Pooh!" cried Mrs. Mirrables, snapping her pretty fingers with a laugh. "She's sane enough—sane enough to pay you out in your own coin, and to like doing it, my friend—to like doing it."

"I'll stop it, though," said Harry, jumping up. "I'm not going to stand that sort of thing. The idea of me——"

"The idea of you—the lady-killer of London *par excellence*—being made to endure what you have so often made others endure! But seriously, my dear Harry," she went on, seeing that he was looking very black, "you must be as

philosophical now as you always used to be —about others, I mean. You like having some fun; so does she. You voluntarily stopped the treacle and love business; and as soon as she had got over her fit of childishness she saw things in your light and followed your example. I think you both ought to be very happy. And as, of course, she had to choose some one, how could she have chosen better that Jack Carkey?"

"D—n Jack Carkey!"

"Gently. Just what many men, married men, have said of you. But d—n him or not as you like, I ask you whom else you would have wished her to choose?"

"Really, Lola, you are talking nonsense. What I may have said or done in old days is quite different. I don't want my wife to make a fool of herself and of me."

"According to our code, my dear Harry —the code we have often discussed—she is not making a fool of *herself;* and as to

you—well, with Mlle.—what's her name? —Nettie Vender—you can easily console yourself."

"Nettie Vender has nothing to do with it. These things are quite different in a woman from what they are in a man."

"Are they?"

"Of course they are."

"I wonder whether Mr. Mirrables thought so last year?"

"Last year, Lola," said Harry, with no loss of composure, but still angry; "last year there were a few things I did not know, or knew imperfectly."

"Nonsense!"

"This year is what is the question. I went away——"

"To Mlle. Vender."

"I went away leaving my wife, if a little too fond of dull things, such as schools and churches, and working men's clubs, still about the best wife a man like

me could have. I come back and find her——"

"Find her doing the same, or about the same, as you have been doing. That's about it, isn't it? Ah! my friend, you must accept the rôle of a husband after all; but, for the sake of our old friendship, don't let it be that of a jealous husband."

"Jealous!" shouted poor Harry, indignant. "I'm not jealous. Jealous of Jack Carkey! But I am determined to put a stop to all this; and I come to you, as my only woman friend, to see whether you can help me, and you only give me your silly sneers."

"I learned my philosophy from you, Harry," said Mrs. Mirrables, in the soft tone which had done such execution when detailing her *femme incomprise* woes into the ears of sympathising males.

"It was the philosophy of frivolity, of amusement, Lola—it does not affect such

earnestness as Ethel throws into her new pursuits."

"If you do a thing at all, do it thoroughly," said Lola, sententiously. "I never could act up to that axiom myself, or else——"

"Or else what?" he asked.

"Or else perhaps I shouldn't be here under dear John's roof listening to you."

Harry had a dim recollection of a certain evening at Hurlingham, when, after a good deal of champagne and much looking into his companion's expressive eyes, he had asked Mrs. Mirrables to fly with him to where there was no constraint and no Mr. Mirrables (not in the least meaning the proposition to be taken in earnest—as indeed it was not), and said nothing. But he was dimly conscious of the fact that Lola was looking very pretty sitting on her sofa with her ugly pug as a foil beside her; and that her

mockery was softened by a pleasing undercurrent of flattery and sympathy.

"What the deuce am I to do, Lola?" he asked, sitting down beside her.

We will not trouble ourselves with her answer; suffice it that he stayed on till the dressing-bell rang, and then, hurrying home, was just in time to meet his wife coming downstairs to dinner.

"Don't wait, Ethel," he said, as he ran up to his room.

"Certainly not," she replied, in the cold measured accent she always gave him now. "Certainly not; I am going to the French play with Lady Barsaker, so I cannot wait. You can come in later, if you like."

She had nearly finished her slight repast when he came down, annoyed, more than he would have owned even to himself, by her carelessness of his comfort; so markedly in contrast with her former care for his every small whim in small things.

"Will you come to our box?"

"Who is going?"

"Only Lady Barsaker and Lord Fitzboddle, and—and that's all."

"That's all, is it?"

"That's all. Will you ring and ask whether the brougham has come? I must go and get my cloak. It is nearly eight already."

He ate the cold *entrée* meditatively. There must be an end to this state of things, which had now gone on for more than three weeks. To live with a woman who cared no more for him than she did for the pictures on the wall was a new and unpleasant experience for our Don Juan, and not to be borne.

"Do you mean to come to the box? I wish you would say yes or no, for we can get some one else if you won't."

"Look here, Ethel," said her husband, stopping her as she was about to leave the

room, and closing the door against the curious ears of the servant outside, "I have had enough of this sort of thing, and——"

"Of course," said Mrs. Seyward, in her haughtiest and most indifferent accents, "of course you have. I forgot how much you had been to the play in Paris and Vienna. But, you see, I have not had your opportunities. Will you let me pass, please? I promised Lady Barsaker to pick her up at eight. Well, we won't keep a place in the box. Thank you. Good night."

Despite himself and his anger, which was hot within him, he obeyed her imperious gesture and opened the door for her to sail out, looking, as he could not help owning, the handsomest woman he had ever seen.

Before he had eaten many more mouthfuls the last postman came and rapped his

eventful double-knock at the door, and a letter with the Paris postmark was put into Harry's hand:—

"MON CHER AMI,

"You see I am at Paris. In another day I shall be in your detestable town. I have accepted a season's engagement in the French plays, for I grew sick of Vienna, and—and perhaps I wanted to see you again.

"Bottoloffski has gone to St. Petersburg, to his wife, I believe. They say she has influence with the Czar, and he was ordered home on peril of Siberia; but I know not. Delafosse has given me a magnificent necklace; the stones are—but you shall see them.

"He—Delafosse—cannot get away from the Bourse, or he would have come to London. But—*après tout*, I shall be very glad to see you again, Harry."

And so on. A short time ago he would

have been in ecstatics at the recall of the Russian Prince and the inability of the stockbroker to leave Paris; but now, although of course, as he said to himself, Nettie amused him infinitely, still how uncommonly handsome and well-bred his wife had looked that night as she sailed so scornfully past him!

"By Jove!" said Harry to himself, "I'll just look in at the theatre after all. There's sure to be room."

But there was not much room, for Captain Carkey was long in the limb, while Lady Barsaker's cavalier was also of huge proportions, and the box was small.

Not so small was it, however, as Harry Seyward felt after spending ten minutes there, during which he was adroitly made by the other four to feel like an interloper.

One whisper indeed Lady Barsaker, with whom he had once been intimate enough, vouchsafed him behind her fan when the

others were all deeply interested in the stage business.

"Don't spoil sport, Harry."

"Spoil sport!" he gasped, for this was sufficient to astonish even him.

"No, you of all people shouldn't. By the by, *she's* coming here, I hear. Why didn't you tell us? Perhaps it's lucky we chose to-night to come here, eh?" And her ladyship glanced across the box at Ethel, who was just at that moment laughing at one of Captain Carkey's witticisms, for Captain Carkey was an acknowledged wit.

Harry, whose philosophy was not so deep as he had imagined when it was only tried by the misfortunes of others, ground his teeth, and soon left the box and went to "Pratt's" in so bad a temper that even the mild beings who spend their evenings at cribbage in the corner of that historical kitchen could almost have quarrelled with

him in the intervals of counting their "one for his nob."

XI.

THIS tale, which has no merit except that of being strictly true, has covered so much more paper than was intended at its commencement, that we must be excused if we hurry a little over its closing lines. Mademoiselle Nettie Vender came to London as advertised, and appeared in the French comedies that were delighting the West End world of London. She sang delicious little songs, specially interpolated for her, which old Lady Blatherton declared were agonizing in their sweetness, and which a serio-comic poet described in the *Morning Telegraph* as "touching with their playful pathos and half-sad coquetry;" and great ladies were not ashamed to send their maids to the dress-circle to take note of

her ever-changing, ever-wonderful costumes.

Harry Seyward ought to have been a proud man. Everyone envied him; and so great was the desire of "the best people" to have Mlle. Vender in their houses that they got up quite a sad sentimental history of her attachment to our hero; and even the Duchess of Stornoway felt that in this case, for some mysterious reason, the usual standard of British morality might be a little departed from. All the time Harry himself was in the position of a man gradually recovering his sight and senses. A hundred things in the actress that before had delighted him as pretty originalities now struck him as simply vulgar. The paint on her face, the powder on her hands, even the ready repartee, all began to disgust him. Do what he would he could not help comparing her with his own wife, who was with Captain Carkey probably at the very moment he was thinking of her. It

was infamous! No—by the way—not so very; for was not he with Miss Nettie? But that was different.

"Lucky dog!" said old Bobby Smedhurst, who was privileged to say anything he chose, "you have a friend to give you happiness abroad, and another friend to ensure you peace at home. Lucky dog!"

And the lucky dog slunk off to the Langham Hotel, where Mlle. Vender was lodged in much splendour, feeling more like a schoolboy going to his daily task than a smart man of fashion pursuing a splendid success. It was an expensive amusement too. Nettie was accustomed to Russian Princes and Parisian bankers and stock-jobbers, and partook to a large extent of the qualities attributed to that daughter of a horse-leech of whom we have all read; and Mr. Seyward was not a man to have much spare money to spend. To run up enormous bills for his wife to pay seemed mean, especially when he thought

that probably Carkey would look over them and perhaps advise as to their settlement. Altogether, although no doubt it was rather pleasant to have his name associated with that of the beautiful actress of whom all men and women talked, still there was a crumple or two in the rose-leaf.

The Season began to wane; the French plays were approaching their end, when Ethel announced to her husband that she intended to go to Homburg with Lady Barsaker.

"And who else?" he asked.

"Lord Barsaker, I suppose."

"Lord Barsaker never stirs from Bearacre, as you know. You mean his Lordship's proxy—I forget who that is just now. Who else?"

"I'm sure I don't know or care."

"Jack Carkey, perhaps?"

"Perhaps. Lucy Barsaker has not told

me exactly whom she has asked to come with us, but of course we must have two men to look after us."

"And Greyton?"

"Oh, Greyton may take care of itself, or you can go there if you like."

"Thank you."

"Where does Mademoiselle Vender go when she leaves the theatre here?"

"I don't know."

"Oh!"

The contemptuous incredulity she threw into this monosyllable was grand—worthy of Miss Vender herself.

"I am to sing at Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Dublin—all sorts of horrid places," said the actress to him a few hours later; "you will come?"

He thought of that "Oh!" of his wife, and made answer—

"Yes, of course I will come."

But, nevertheless, he hated the idea of

another long absence from—from what? From England, from Greyton, or, could it be—from his wife's side?

Mrs. Mirrables, whom he met at a party that night, consoled him prettily.

"It's much better so, Harry. Of course your business with this actress won't last for ever, neither will Ethel's with Jack. But, when a split *must* come, it's better to have it over and done with. You each go your own way now without any bother or jealousies, and—and, Harry, if ever you want a quiet talk by the chimney corner, and perhaps a word or two of sympathy, you know you will always find me in Park Street."

And Lola gave her most dangerous look, which she might just as well have spent upon a brick wall.

For—it is of no use our trying to keep the secret any longer from our discerning readers—Harry Seyward had fallen hopelessly in love with his own wife!

XII.

By a coincidence—if there be such a thing in this world of predestination—it happened that the day chosen by Mrs. Seyward for her start for Homburg was the same day on which Mr. Seyward was to escort Mademoiselle Vender to Liverpool.

Of course there was much packing the day before in Prince's Gate, and there was not much time for the husband and wife to exchange many words. At lunch there were the usual amount of people who liked Harry's dry sherry—Captain Carkey among the number—and after lunch Ethel started off on a round of farewell calls, tempered by much shopping. Harry roamed about the streets for some time irresolute and unhappy. The latter was a new feeling to him, and it angered him as the first fit of gout does. It seemed to him that the next day the door would be irrevocably closed on the possibility of an explanation with his wife; as if, once they went their re-

spective roads, those roads could never meet again.

And she had never looked so queen-like, so entirely a woman that a man might be proud to call his own, as she did that day among her guests at luncheon. Her ease of manner was so different from the wild familiarity of Nettie Vender's. Her low soft laugh was so sweet compared with the other's rather shrill gaiety. And yet—he was her husband, and Captain Jack Carkey —it made his blood boil, and even as his blood was boiling he called a Hansom and drove to the Langham Hotel. Here a surprise awaited him.

"Ha, Harry!" said Nettie, nodding to him as he entered, but continuing her occupation, which was the unusual one of writing a letter, "I was going to send you a note. All my plans are altered. I have refused to sign the agreement for the nasty provinces. I am going to take a holiday—a holiday in Italy."

"And you don't want me to come?" exclaimed Harry, trying to throw dismay into his voice, but feeling like a reprieved criminal.

Nettie was a little embarrassed—only a little, she was accustomed to these things.

"Well, *mon cher*, no. The fact is, we are both getting a little tired of each other; not our fault—nature. And we shall meet much more agreeably in a few months' time."

"I suppose the Prince has obtained leave from his wife and the Czar to come back from Russia?" said Harry, sarcastically.

"You have guessed it," she cried, clapping her hands. "How quick you are! His wife is dead, at least, so he didn't want leave from her; and he is to be in Paris to meet me on Tuesday. Oh! how I should have detested Liverpool and Manchester!"

"With me?" This with some pathos, for Harry thought he ought at least to be

thrown over, even for the richest prince in Russia, with some show of decency.

"With anyone, my dear. You are not offended?"

She went on writing as she asked the question.

"Not the least. And the bill here—the Prince pays, I suppose?"

The pen stopped.

"Ah! *La note.* No; will you see about that, Harry, and about the payment for the horses and carriages and things? That's a good child."

"And when do you start?"

"*Mon Dieu!* Immediately. I have time for nothing—not even for you. If you only knew the things I have to do! I declare I wish dress had never been invented!"

"So do I," said Harry, with some sincerity, remembering sundry dressmakers' accounts he had lately been called upon to settle.

And then, with his purse, perhaps his heart also, considerably lightened, he went to his Club, and eventually, after dining there, for his wife dined with Lady Barsaker, back to Prince's Gate.

And as he sat in his room at the back, and smoked, with the last edition of the *Globe* on his lap, he thought of many things; but chiefly of a certain day when he had forgotten that Ethel Erle was an heiress, and only remembered she was a sweet honest woman who loved him.

Worldliness and cynicism do not flourish in solitude, and the natural good that was in the man came to the surface as he sat there alone, with the blue wreaths of smoke around him; as he sat there alone like any ordinary unhappy husband—like poor John Mirrables, for instance—and wished and regretted, and did all but hope.

He started as he heard a knock at the front door, and stood up irresolutely when he heard his wife's accents in the passage,

giving the servant some order for the morrow.

He heard her words—they were about her departure by the early train. He opened his door just as she was going past it, and called her—"Ethel!"

Only her name! The servants were still in the hall, closing the front door. Only her name! But there was something in his accent that made her pause, and caused her colour to come and go as she stood there.

"Ethel!"

The servants had gone downstairs. She came to his room half unwillingly.

He said not another word. She looked up into his face, and saw that tears were in his eyes. She saw that he held out his arms, and in another moment she was clasped to his breast.

"Forgive me, wife!"

"Say that again—not about forgiveness—but the word *wife!* Say that again!"

"My wife!"

"Oh, Harry!"

There was a long pause.

"I am a scoundrel," he said at last; and then she looked up into his face.

"No—you are—my husband! Oh, Harry, did you believe in all that about—about Captain Carkey?

"No," said he, but with a gulp.

"You must have. I was acting—I have been acting all the while. I hated it all; I loathed Captain Carkey. He said a thing to me to-day which—which nearly drove me mad to hear; but I had begun my plan—my wretched plan—and—and I couldn't stop."

"You love me still?"

"Still. Why do you think I have done all this—even painted my face," she exclaimed, with a spasmodic rub at it with her handkerchief, "except for one reason? But, Harry, I *couldn't* have gone on with it; I couldn't have kept up my friendship for

Lady Barsaker and all those horrid people any longer. I should have died of it all."

"And you didn't like Carkey?" asked Harry, still bewildered.

"I hated him all along; but he was the first man I happened to meet after I—after I had determined to try and—to try and be more like you——" she added, with a shy smile.

He kissed her lips. "So it was a plot?"

"Yes; it was wicked, wasn't it?—but I —I——Oh, Harry, are you going to Liverpool with that woman?"

"No. Are you going to Homburg with that man?"

"After this!" she said, putting an arm round his neck. "Do you know that I couldn't have gone anyhow? I felt that to-night I must have broken down and implored you to come to me again, my darling! I was stupid and dull with you

before—about Greyton schools and things —when I ought to have amused you and been more of a companion to you. But —and my heart seemed breaking to-night —when I heard you say *Ethel*, somehow I felt that—that my heart needn't break after all!"

"I am not worthy of you, Ethel!"

"Of me!—of the woman all London is talking of for her flirting and painting! I am not as pretty as Miss Vender, I know —but——"

"Never say such things, my love! You are the best and the most beautiful woman in the world! How could I ever have left you for a moment!"

"Because I was so dull and cold, Harry. And now—we can't stay in London—where shall we go to-morrow? To Paris?"

"No; to Greyton. I want to help you to look after the schools."

"But you will be so bored. There will be nothing for you to do!"

"I want to have nothing to do, Ethel, but to look into your sweet eyes and to hear a hundred times a day from your sweet lips that you forgive me, and that you love me —and not Captain Carkey!"

KILSHEELAH.

KILSHEELAH.

I.

WHEN the late Earl of Quorn was gathered to his fathers, dying, no doubt (his Lordship's spiritual adviser said so), in the odour of sanctity, but certainly also in the odour of brandy—for his Lordship's disease would have been called "delirium tremens" in a lesser mortal—shrewd mothers, with little girls learning their Mangnall's Questions in the school-room, made mental notes to the effect that the Quorn estates were amongst the largest in England, and that the young earl had a minority of some ten years, in which

a sum of ready money might be amassed which would certainly make him, on attaining the magic age of twenty-one, the richest young Peer that could be found. And of the fact of his importance the boy was never suffered to be oblivious. Governesses, tutors, servants, relations all dinned into his poor little head what a great personage he was. At Eton—though the boys might kick him—the masters bowed down; at Oxford he quickly was surrounded by a circle of admiring and dirt-eating toadies, who were ready to call his clouds weasels, or whales, or anything else his grandeur chose to assume them to be.

From morning to night there was one chorus of adulation and flattery around him; and by his mother (who had been a great beauty, and who was supposed to have had a history in her youth—a history that Society had prudently forgotten) he was taught not only to despise, but to take the

utmost advantage of, the willingness of his brother mortals to be kicked. True, he sometimes seemed to be inclined to run out of the groove, and there was terrible excitement in the family and all its branches (which, as everyone knows, embrace half the Peerage), when it became known that young Reginald had expressed his absolute determination to wed a young lady he had encountered at a fair which was held near his private tutor's—a young lady who enacted the principal part in the ten minutes' dramas which were performed in the caravan theatre.

He was then seventeen, and the girl about the same age, and they had billed, and cooed, and kissed in the summer evenings for some little time before the discovery was made by the tutor. Then young Quorn showed his teeth, threatened to kick the reverend gentleman if he wrote to Lady Quorn, and finally, when he found that even

this strong measure could not prevent it, wrote to her himself, and boldly declared his intention.

Then when a separation between the young couple had been effected—a separation the more complete as Jenny could not write—he vowed that nothing should prevent him, when once his own master, from seeking her out and conferring on her his august hand. But the powers were too strong for him. Whether Jenny was sent to America, or exterminated, or sold into slavery, he did not know: she disappeared entirely, and with that last kiss, snatched amid a profusion of sobs in the little lane behind the fair green, vanished Quorn's first, perhaps his purest, bit of romance.

Of course the tutor lost his lucrative pupil, and—poor man—he turned in revenge upon the cause of his misfortune, and had a great deal to do with the putting down of the fair where Jenny had shown her too seductive charms to the young nobleman.

At College young Quorn seemed determined to exhaust all the pleasures and excitements of life; to anticipate his entrance into the real world. Terrible stories were told of his gambling, drinking, and other excesses which will not bear the light. Perhaps half was true, and certainly the young gentleman who at twenty startled all London by making his *début* as the winner of nearly a hundred thousand pounds on the Derby had very little of the tyro in him, nor needed much initiation into "life."

Living in the fierce light that beats upon a titled millionaire, every action of his was magnified and distorted. Those who personally liked him, or who hoped to get anything from him, formed one party who vowed he was perfection; the general bulk of Society, who thought "the line should be drawn somewhere, you know," took delight in retailing fearful tales of him in Club and drawing-room, but was uncommonly civil to him notwithstanding.

That there were ladies living at his expense in most of the capitals of Europe; that his doings when on a tour in India were too awful for Christians to name; that he had already had two attacks of delirium tremens; that he employed his wealth for the basest uses; that he had murdered a husband in Italy; that he had caused the suicide of a girl in France—such things as these were said of him as a matter of course; and scarcely a week passed without one of those newspapers which our civilization has produced, for the purpose of ministering to the desire of ladies and gentlemen to be notorious, publishing a thinly-veiled allusion to him, with some new scandal evolved from the editor's inner consciousness, but amusing enough all the same.

At first Quorn, surprised and taken aback at the disagreeable fame thus thrust upon him, protested that, if he had his faults, he was not worse than others of his kind and class. No. Society had made up its mind

to have a magnificent monster, and who would act the part better than this good-looking young man, with his contempt for *les convenances* and his unlimited purse and grand position?

Then he became disgusted, and ended by surrounding himself with a little court of adroit, if somewhat vulgar, parasites, who kept the outer world from his majesty, and amid whose endless chorus of praise he was content to live—like the fabled beast who puts his head in the sand to escape detection.

He gave himself up—or seemed to give himself up—to purely animal pleasures. His racing stud was the largest in the kingdom; he took a pack of hounds; he yachted; he shot stags and grouse in Scotland, pheasants and partridges by the cart-load at his places in Norfolk and elsewhere. His fondness for reading, which more than one of his tutors had hoped would be the saving of him, seemed to have evaporated. Sur-

rounded by his little court of toadies, he lounged through life in the best of everything; cold, impenetrable, now and then rather troubling his satellites by flashes of a disdainful wit they did not understand, but open-handed and very careless as to the little liberties they took with his purse and house, as long as he was never thwarted in the smallest particular. His hatred of opposition had almost become a mania, and a moment of forgetfulness, when the natural man for an instant asserted itself over the toady, had cost many an unfortunate the *entrée* to Quorn House and all the other palaces where the young nobleman dispensed what the papers call a "princely hospitality." And, indeed, such a host had never been seen before. When you stayed with him in Leicestershire, two horses were daily sent on for you as naturally as you were given your breakfast. Should you wish to drive you ordered your coach, or phaeton, or dog-cart, as if the stables were

yours. When you went to shoot with him there was no necessity to take cartridges; and what luncheons that caravan-like cart used to bring out to refresh the sportsmen wearied with over-shooting!

Special trains everywhere for himself and his friends were a matter of course; did one of the charmed circle wish to go anywhere out of the way, one of the yachts was put at his orders immediately; was one of these lucky persons in a temporary difficulty, he had only to name the sum and the cheque was written. As some one said at the Club, "Quorn has raised the character of toadyism, for he has made its reward only second to the reward for piety." And if his courtiers were not perhaps of the very first refinement, they were, at any rate, quite capable of appreciating the joys of the position they had attained.

It may be imagined what consternation was caused among them when the rumour —at first scouted as preposterous—grew to

certainty, by announcement in the *Morning Post*, "Lord Quorn was engaged to be married to Lady Hilda Thurles."

II.

"BET you two to one it doesn't come off," said one young gentleman to another in the M——, Club.

"Can't bet on a certainty. Joneson told me yesterday that the day was fixed."

"But Q.'s bolted."

"Bolted? No. He goes away—no one knows where—for three months every year. He caught some one—Todhunter it was, I think—trying to find out where he went last year, and poor Toddy's lost his berth at Quorndale for good. They say he heard him asking questions of his valet and kicked him downstairs."

"Bet you I know where he goes."

"Where?"

"To his wife."

"His wife!" There was a general chorus of astonishment.

"Yes; don't you remember that story about the girl he tried to marry when he was at a tutor's? Bet you six to four he's married her, and that's where he goes."

"He might go to her without so much as all that," said another.

"Oh, he's one of your infernally unprincipled fellows who always do these conscientious things! They are so wicked, they are afraid of their conscience, you know."

"Bet you three to one Q. has not got a conscience," put in the sporting youth.

"But about Lady Hilda," said a man with regular features, curly chestnut hair, and an exquisitely neat and well got-up figure, approaching the group; "what on earth does she do it for?"

"For? Where's the new Doomsday Book? Why, Q.'s income must be at least——"

"Oh, I know; but she might have done

nearly as well, I should have thought, without taking him. He'll probably kill her in a fit of D. T., and, as to the story of a wife somewhere and his odd disappearances, I am rather inclined to believe it."

"It'll be rather fine if the other lady appears at the church and stops the ceremony. I'm hanged if I won't go. But it would be a bore for Lady Hilda."

"I can't make out why Q. wants to marry her."

"Oh! I believe they met at Coldervale last year, and he was surprised at her not throwing herself at his head like the rest, and got piqued, and then I think he was sorry for her with Lady Tip. I hear he said he proposed for the novelty of being snubbed; but he didn't get it, for she took a month to think it over and then wrote to accept him. I expect she's a young woman who knows what's what."

"Hush!" murmured one, with a glance

at him of the chestnut hair and good figure.

"Oh, Jack Spang chucked it up long ago. She wouldn't have him at any price—for all his looks, poor Jack! Ah! here's Lord Tipperary. I must congratulate you on what I see here," pointing to the *Morning Post.*

"Yes; we're going to put her in double harness," said Lord Tipperary, twirling his splendid white moustache. "A devilish good fellow Quorn, devilish good fellow. I'm not a man to care for money, and all that sort of thing; but, of course, it's gratifying. I never saw two young people so much in love with one another. Any whist going on?"

"Yes, they are asking for you."

And the Peer who had long puzzled the world as to how he managed to play whist for "monkeys" and back horses for "thous" on his slender income—with so

expensive a wife, too—passed away to his favourite amusement.

The man they had called Jack Spang, after a fond look at his handsome face in the glass over the mantel-piece, lounged out of the Club, up St. James's Street, nodding to many acquaintances, and taking off his hat to many carriages as he went along, and eventually rang the bell at the door of a house in Dover Street.

"Lady Tipperary at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, Captain Spang, I am so glad you have called; I wanted to ask you about the poor X's. Is it true that she has gone?"

Jack Spang did all that was required of him in the way of gossip, but his eyes wandered continually to the door, and at last he gave his details so badly and with so little artistic finish that her Ladyship rose, evidently intending his visit to come to a termination.

"Lady Hilda is quite well?" he asked, twisting his hat about in his hands, and looking less at ease with himself than usual.

"Very well, thank you, Captain Spang," said Lady Tipperary, coldly, "and very happy. She is out now."

Of course so great a lady would not tell what is called in the nursery a taradiddle, but poor Jack felt sure, as he went mournfully downstairs, that he heard a note of the piano from the room which was sacred to the Penates of the future Lady Quorn.

And as he walked down Dover Street he muttered something between his teeth that was not complimentary, we fear, to the Countess.

III.

THE piano ceased playing, and Lady Hilda came into the drawing-room. A lovely girl

you would have said at the first glance—upright, graceful, dignified, with perfectly cut features and large hazel eyes. Scarcely a loveable girl you would have said at a second glance. The look in the eyes was hard, the expression of the lips was proud, contemptuous. A girl you could not help admiring as a work of art; scarcely one you would care to take to your home as a companion.

There was something about Lady Hilda that seemed to deny her the ordinary successes of an acknowledged beauty. When she first came out people had raved of her; artists raved of her still; and no Academy Exhibition was perfect without a counterfeit presentment of her features.

But, although she was "the fashion," no men—except poor Jack Spang, who had not a sixpence—had ever wished to take her and her beauty for their own. She seemed to be isolated in her loveliness—to freeze back the warm words that lesser beauties called forth. Her third season had arrived,

and her mother was in despair. All the expense of the London house, and the dinners, and the one ball; all the trouble and the sitting up of nights and the little ruses to catch elder sons—all for nothing. Nothing caught in so fine a net except the little minnow, Spang, who had, of course, to be thrown back again as useless.

Lady Tip, as her friends and her enemies called her, was not one to take reverse easily, however placidly her daughter might bear her reproaches; and the scenes between the two, when at the end of the season the bills came in and Lord Tipperary stormed at their magnitude (though perhaps he had lost or won double the amount on a race-course the day before), were not pleasant to witness. But no one ever did witness them; for in public Lady Tip was a most affectionate mother, and very proud of "dear Hilda's determination not to marry till she is really attached."

"I have heard this evening from dear Regi-

nald," said she, as her daughter came into the room with that stately step of hers which alone was enough to alarm most men out of an offer.

"Oh!"

"Have not you too?"

"Yes; I had a note from him."

"And you never told me."

"It scarcely matters, as you say you have heard."

"Well, you couldn't tell that. But, of course, I must bear anything from you now. After all I have done to bring this about, the way I have worked to put you in the position you now—thanks to me!—are in."

"I think we have had enough of this, mother. Having been given up as a failure, I have now exceeded your proudest hopes. Surely that may content you."

"Hilda, you are the most ungrateful girl!"

"Surely I am showing you my gratitude now."

"By treating me in this manner?"

"By marrying Lord Quorn?"

"A great sacrifice, truly. You—a girl who has had but one proposal in three years—to turn up your nose at a man like that!"

"I don't turn up my nose at him. I like his position and his money very much. Only I don't like him; and if Captain Spang had only had just enough to live upon I would never have accepted him, as you know."

"Captain Spang! A snob like that! Why, when he was here just now I couldn't help comparing him with Reginald—the handsomest, noblest——"

"Stop, mamma. You are confusing him with his bankers' book. As to Captain Spang, I am perfectly aware that to accept him would be madness; but I tell you

plainly that I don't intend to get up any enthusiasm about Lord Quorn. I will marry him, if he chooses; but before I do so—to-night, as he has come back from his mysterious hiding—I shall tell him exactly the truth."

"And spoil the whole thing, ruin your whole prospects, and break your father's heart!" almost shrieked poor Lady Tip.

"Nothing is likely to do *that* except his partner revoking, I should think," said the girl, calmly, with that repressed scorn which frightened everyone—even her mother.

"But you will be civil to him—at least, you will be nice and kind to him? You know you can't marry Captain Spang," she pleaded, almost piteously. "If it were to be broken off now it would be so terrible. People would say——"

"People would say," interrupted the girl, almost fiercely, "that he had thought better of it; that I hadn't played my cards quite well enough; that you and I were fools to

let him get away. That's about what people would say."

"I never heard such horrible language!" said Lady Tip. At that moment Lord Quorn was shown in.

Acting from impulse, as he always did, he had come straight from the railway to their house; but travel stains and careless, almost slovenly clothes could not disguise the fact that he was as fine-looking a young man as you would find in a very long walk. Scarcely noticing Lady Tip, whom he treated with a careless unconcern that she vowed to have her revenge for some day, he sat down at once by Hilda's side on the sofa, and addressed himself so entirely to her that soon her mother thought it advisable to retire and leave the young couple alone.

Hilda said but little, and listened with an impassive smile to his queer, abrupt snatches of conversation. At last he said—

"Are you sorry the day is fixed?"

"No."

"Glad?"

"Well, it is always as well to know exactly——"

"The day of execution," he said, finishing her sentence for her, and laughing rather bitterly.

"Exactly when one's things must be ready," she went on, as if he had not spoken.

He looked at her rather wistfully for a moment. If he tried to divine her thoughts he might as well have looked at a statue.

"Why do you marry me?" he asked, abruptly.

"Why do I—— "

"Yes. Do you love me? No, perhaps that is a word of no significance now. Do you care for me as a girl should care for the man she is to marry?"

He stood in front of her with folded arms and a peculiar expression on his face. Lady Hilda thought for a moment ere she

answered, and then said, in her usual calm, cold tone—

"I hope I shall do my duty as your wife, Lord Quorn."

"Do you hope that? Duty! A pretty word for lovers. But a good word, too; and a good thing, duty. Look here, Hilda. Of course I know what people say of me; but perhaps I'm not as black as I am painted. I want to marry you because I must marry; they tell me it is my duty, and, this being so (you see I am frank)—I like you better than any other girl I have seen—I think you will fill the position (as it is called) better than any other I know. Tell me *your* reasons."

"You asked me whether I loved you. No. Love and I have nothing to do with one another, I think. I will be as frank as you. I have accepted you because I must marry—because (I know I can trust you) I *cannot* live any longer with my mother,

whose worldliness sets my teeth on edge hourly. Of course you may say that I am the more worldly in doing this. Perhaps you would be right. I have cared for a man—whom it is impossible I should marry —and I have put him out of my thoughts. I will marry you, if you like to take me, because you are rich, and because you can help my father and take me from a wretched home."

"And I accept your sacrifice, Hilda," he said, taking her impassive hand in his. "It is a purely business transaction, fitting to our enlightened nineteenth century."

And there was sadness as well as bitterness in his voice as he spoke.

IV.

A LITTLE cousin and old playfellow of Hilda's, Emilia, had married a parson of the name of Harrison McCorquodale, and living in the wilds of Western Ireland,

where he had just obtained a cure of souls, they were very glad of the house in Dover Street when they came to town on an occasional visit. These visits gave much annoyance to Lady Tip, who hated doing a kindness that did not bring its own reward with it; but Hilda knew how to get her own way in small matters on which she had set her heart, and the pretty, laughing face of Emilia McCorquodale was very frequently seen at their dinner and lunch-table during the summer.

Emilia was an enthusiast, believing in her husband, who prophesied the end of the world, and wrote terrible diatribes against the Pope, and raved about Ritualism, Jesuits, and other horrors. She even believed that she liked being shut up with that estimable man in the damp and lonely parsonage to which he had just been appointed.

"You must come to Kilsheelah some day, Hilda; it is the loveliest village you ever

saw—on the lake, you know; and Mr. Harborough has made it a very Paradise."

"And who is Mr. Harborough?" asked Hilda, patting her friend's silky hair.

Hilda was a woman who assumed, as a matter of course, a kind of protective, petting manner with other women who were young and pretty—being one of the few women who could honestly admire another without a particle of jealousy or detraction. Nay, she had a way of falling in love with them in a manner aggravating for the other sex to witness.

"Mr. Harborough is a wonderful man," said Mr. McCorquodale, solemnly. "Perhaps one of the most wonderful men I have ever seen."

"Oh, he's such a dear! No one knows anything of him, except that he is *quite perfect.* He came to Kilsheelah five years ago, and took a tiny cottage; and they say he lives there on next to nothing, with an old woman to look after him, and a few books

and a dog! And the good he does! At first the priests interfered, but now they know he won't try to worry the people about their religion. The way he looks after the old people and those that are ill! He knows more than the doctors, and they send for him; and I believe he pays the doctors not to mind; and he reads to the old people for days together, and nurses the babies when required, and helps them all in their farms—as well with advice as with actual labour. And out of his savings—Harrison is afraid he is giving away all he has—he has built a little club in the village, and managed to get gardens for a lot of the cottages; and he always comes with a heap of presents for the poorest people; and then —you'd scarcely believe it, Hilda—but he's quite young, and so handsome!"

"Upon my word," said Hilda, laughing, "he does seem to be perfection! And so they all like him, then?"

"Like him! They simply adore him.

Harrison thinks he is a man who has been in some trouble—done something wrong, and has to keep out of the way; but I can't think that he has ever done anything wrong. The only thing is that he has business which takes him away a great deal; but when he comes back, I declare you would know it by the smiling faces of everyone for miles round."

Mrs. McCorquodale's eulogium had to cease here, as visitors entered the room, and she soon departed with her husband for the Royal Academy, to wonder at British Art.

"What a difference," thought Hilda to herself, as she sat beside her mother in the carriage that night on the way to a ball, "between that man Emilia was telling me of and one like Lord Quorn. One useful, loved, splendid in his humble way; the other useless, flattered, and disliked—a waste of creative power on the part of Providence."

Poor Jack Spang gnashed his beautiful white teeth that night as he saw, for the first time, the engaged couple together; but was somewhat consoled to mark that she seldem spoke and appeared little flattered by her enviable position. Besides, Miss Cottopolis was there, and Jack felt himself in duty bound to make himself agreeable to that young heiress. His flirtation with this young lady would perhaps have progressed less smoothly could he have overheard a conversation later on that night in the supper-room, when Quorn and his intended were seated at a corner table.

"I should like to spend the honeymoon in Ireland."

"In Ireland! Well, I have no objection. But where in that land shall it be? Killarney?"

"No. A village called Kilsheelah, in the West."

Quorn started slightly. "Kilsheelah! I have heard of it. Why, it is miles away

from any railway. No, no, we cannot possibly go there."

"But if I have set my heart on it?"

"I am sure you would not set your heart on anything so preposterous."

"But I have. I insist on this, Lord Quorn."

His brow darkened ominously at the defiant tone she used. Perhaps it seemed to him a good opportunity of once for all asserting his authority, for he made answer with unnecessary sternness—

"I am sorry, Hilda, to be obliged to refuse any request of yours at such a time."

"But you do refuse it?"

"Yes. It is a whim which——"

"Let it be a whim or not, it is the first thing I have ever asked of you. I will go nowhere else for my honeymoon."

"I am sorry," said he, a peculiar look in his face as he met her resolute eyes, "but you will not go there."

"Then I will go nowhere—with you."

"Be it so," and he bowed gravely, offered her his arm, and took her back to Lady Tip.

Once again during the evening he approached her, as she was waiting for her mother to extract her cloak from the enormous bag, embroidered with a huge coronet and J. T. in raised gold, which that lady carried to balls with her.

"Is this your final resolve, Lady Hilda?

"Yes, Lord Quorn."

V.

It was not long before the male tattlers of Society were buzzing about the five o'clock tea-tables with their different versions of the breaking off of the marriage between Lady Hilda and Lord Quorn. That he had suddenly left London was certain; the rest was rather speculative, for Lady Tip, when in-

terrogated, was sphinx-like in her replie
Poor woman, to have her hopes crushed
the eleventh hour was indeed cruel, and tl
more so as she could get no reason for tl
change out of her daughter.

"You may call it a quarrel if y
like, mamma, but not a 'lovers' quarre
We agreed to differ, and we discover
that we had better differ apart than t
gether."

"Well," said her Ladyship, with a co
centrated bitterness that was appalling, "
it was for the sake of your Captain Spar
you have made a slight mistake, as it
announced to-day that he marries that vu
gar Miss Cottopolis."

"It was not for the sake of Capta
Spang, and you have no right to s
so."

"All London"—as those flies on tl
coach-wheel, the denizens of the West En
call themselves—said all sorts of thin

about it. He had a wife after all? Yes, and seven children. And it was to be all proved at once. Nay, he had two wives, and would be indicted for bigamy at next Sessions. He had grown sick of Lady Hilda. He had come drunk to Dover Street and insulted her. He had caught her trying to run away with the footman, and cast her off.

Society had great sport over it, and tore it and worried it with much animation.

At last, wearied out by her mother's ceaseless accusations and recriminations, Hilda offered to spend a month with her cousin Emilia at their Irish rectory—an offer joyfully accepted.

"Oh, darling!" said Emilia, "it is all very dreadful and mysterious. Of course I don't want you to tell me any secrets, but was he so very dreadful? I never saw him, you know."

"Not so very," said Hilda, with a half

smile, "only we didn't care for one another, you see."

VI.

KILSHEELAH, as far as beauty of situation was concerned, certainly deserved all the praise the rector's wife had given it. It was nestled between two hills that swept down in all the beauty of heather and gigantic many-coloured rock to the edge of the Atlantic, which fretted and fumed up to the very doors of some of the fishing cottages at high water. Above it stood the mountain from which the great Irish saint pronounced his curse against the reptiles and drove them for ever from the land; while all around stretched the wild heather-girt moors, carrying the eye on to the distant range of blue hills on which the grouse disported themselves, undisturbed by tourist and sportsman.

"It was," as Hilda said, "a splendid

place to forget London in—a place where one almost forgets there are such things as worldly people."

"Yes," said Emilia, who had come in bursting with intelligence; "but he's here, dear."

"He! Who?"

"Mr. Harborough!"

"Ah—yes—I had almost forgotten your paragon. And yet it was a curiosity to see him and the place you say he has done such wonders for that made me——"

And she stopped, musing over the slight things that suffice to alter a destiny. Did she regret her petulance and its result? Did she sigh once again to stand on the pedestal of the last of the Quorns' destined bride?

She walked with her friend into the village, and was surprised to note its difference from any other in Ireland she had seen. It had been terribly neglected, she was told, for the landlord lived away in England, and even the agent only came to that out-of-the-

way spot to collect the rents. The people were very poor too; and their trifles of land and casual fishing scarcely sufficed to keep them alive. Yet in every house she found cleanliness and contentment, and everywhere there was one strong feeling—love and gratitude to this Mr. Harborough, who had done all the good.

Hilda soon saw that—although everything had been done so unostentatiously as to almost escape detection—there must have been a great deal of money spent by this mysterious philanthropist. A new door here, the price of a roof there, a pigstye in another place; presents of books, of crockery, of farm instruments, of all kinds of little things, the want of which crippled these poor folk in small ways—all these things had been supplied by him; and, besides this, she heard of debts to the landlord paid by him, of little scores at the shebeen-house wiped off, of many bits of generosity of the like kind.

"He is a fairy prince your Mr. Harborough, but when shall I see him in the flesh?" she said.

"I don't know," said Emilia, despondingly; "he seems to avoid me. I have written him at least three notes, and he has taken no notice. And I never see him in the village now."

Hilda grew interested in this little mystery, and often talked to the people of their benefactor. "It isn't the things he gives us," one remarked, "it's what he says to us and does for us. When Paddy Blake's boy was so ill, didn't he sit up with him for three nights, for poor Paddy is in bed, you know, and never lave him, and didn't the doctor say he'd saved his life? There's Johnnie Maguire, dying yonder now, the poor old critter; it was Mr. Harborough got him to lave off the whisky—when he'd near died of it last year. I'd wager he's there in the house with him now." And the man nodded to a cabin hard by.

Insatiable curiosity seized upon Hilda. She went to the cabin, gently opened the half-door, disturbing an ancient hen which sat thereon, and looked in. By the dim light (for an Irishman delights in tiny windows) she saw an old man lying on a bed, and seated by him, with his back to her, another, reading a chapter of the Bible.

Something in his voice charmed her to the spot. Never had she heard the sacred book with so much tender pathos.

The reading ceased, and the reader spoke.

"I will leave you to sleep now, Johnnie, and come back to-morrow morning. You feel happier—more ready to go now than you did?"

She could not catch the old man's answer, but she saw his wasted hand close on the other's, and she saw a feeble effort to carry it to his lips.

Then she had only time to step hastily back, when he who had been reading rose up and came out of the cabin.

"Lord Quorn!"

VII.

"WHY have you followed me—even here?" he asked, the softness fading out of his face.

"I have not followed you," she stammered. "I did not know—I——"

"You did not know I played the fool elsewhere than in London. At least you might have left me this."

"What does all this mean, Lord Quorn? Are you——"

"Must I answer your questions? No, you have no right to ask them. I asked you to be my wife, and, for a silly whim's sake, you rejected me. Leave me alone when I am happy."

"Are you Mr. Harborough?" she asked, persisting, but amazed almost beyond words.

"Yes, I am Mr. Harborough. I knew you were here, but I hoped you would go before long, and that we should not meet."

"But why——"

She could not finish her sentence. The world seemed to have turned upside down.

"Why do I come out here under another name, and trouble myself about these poor people? I will tell you, Lady Hilda. When I was a boy I fell in love—a foolish affair, no doubt, but I was in love all the same. I forgot it. Years after, wandering—trying to get rid of *myself*—I came to this village. Accidentally I learned that the girl that had won my boyish love had gone to the bad, and then come back here—for she was a Mayo girl—to die. I lingered here—a sentimental folly, was it not?—and I grew fond of these poor, kindly people. It amused me at first to see their intense gratitude for little things that cost me nothing; but at last their miseries saddened me. I began to hate my life as you know it, but I was too weak entirely to change it. But I came here, for a time each year, to live, as it were, a new one. Away from the mockeries,

and cruelties, and corruptness of what we call 'life' over there, I am a new man. I forget myself. I live happily in trying to make others happy. In the society you love, Lady Hilda, such a one as I am here would be out of place. Here he can do good. I have gained the love of the poor folk here; and love, which, with all my money, I cannot buy in London, is sweet to me. You have heard what I am called. Perhaps the world is right, but is it the world's fault. Why did they always teach me that I was not a man, but a demi-god? You have found me out, Lady Hilda. Go away, and, when we meet again, try to forget that you have ever known me other than what my friends—friends!—think me. You *will* respect my secret, Lady Hilda?"

But Lady Hilda made him no promise on this point. She only stood abashed before him, holding out her hands, and saying,

"Forgive me."

VIII.

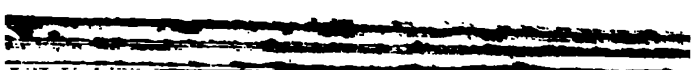
Lord Quorn—or Mr. Harborough, as he was at Kilsheelah—did not depart from the village as he had intended when discovered by Lady Hilda. He did not even shun his friends the McCorquodales any more. He was learning a new lesson—one that no man ever thoroughly does master—that a woman is not easily comprehended. Lady Hilda was a book of which hitherto he had only known the outside. Little by little he was allowed to peep between the leaves, and what he read made the study very pleasant. We have no time to linger with them amid the heather of the Mayo hills, which the dying summer was making more beautiful, as if to challenge the advancing foe armed with snow and ice; we can only record that the London world, or rather that world as it exists in its country quarters, was rather disappointed, after all its good stories, to hear that the match between Lord Quorn and Lady Hilda was not off after all, and

that there was to be no trial for bigamy, or even any action by a plebeian wife for matrimonial rights.

But when, after the marriage, the Quorns did so little for London Society, Society revenged itself by fearful stories of the husband's jealousy, of terrific scenes in the country, of lockings up and knockings down; and loving mothers shrugged their shoulders, and asked what poor dear Lady Tip could have expected when she let her girl marry such a man, even though he might be the richest peer in England.

And yet, improper as it may seem, when the opinion of Society is taken into account, it would be difficult to find, through the length and breadth of England, a happier couple than these two silly people who first knew each other at Kilsheelah.

A BEAR FIGHT.



A BEAR FIGHT.

I.

WHAT you ask me to tell you happened a long while ago, and it is a subject I never willingly recur to. However, as it may possibly be of use that the facts should be narrated exactly as they occurred, I accede to your request, merely remarking that the reader must make every excuse for one unaccustomed to literary exercises.

It is a good many years ago now since the 30th Hussars were in Canada, quartered in that charming town of Quereal, the heaven of subalterns, the very Elysium of

all who are fond of flirting. The stern business that had called us across the water was soon finished, and we turned our attention very seriously to those little *affaires de cœur* which begin so easily, which mean so little, and which it is understood clearly on both sides are to lead to nothing at all. I think almost everyone in the regiment was provided with a muffin except young Arthur Desborough, one of our latest joined cornets, and the puzzle of the whole mess. Be it understood that we were rather a rough regiment—that give and take was our motto, and personal strength a decided advantage; that in our eyes the era of practical joking was far from over; that in the way of literature, save and except those oblong volumes which registered our wagers on horse races, of which we knew little except from the sporting papers,

> "Our only books
> Were woman's looks,"

and it may also be understood with what a

feeling of aversion and repugnance we welcomed a cornet who brought with him a volume of Shakspere, another of Schiller, a well-thumbed de Musset, and other books of that perniciously effeminate stuff called poetry, and absolutely sat upstairs in his bed-room reading them when we were enjoying high jinks in the ante-room after mess.

It perhaps can be imagined in some slight degree how the poor boy was bullied; how his books were burned solemnly; how his furniture was thrown out of window; how he was perpetually "drawn," tried by mimic court-martial, and chaffed without mercy or respite. Yet he persevered in his habits with a mild firmness which incensed some of us very much, notably a certain Captain of ours called Harroch, who seemed to take every indication of a cessation in the warfare of the subalterns of the 30th *versus* Desborough as a personal injury to himself, and who urged us on with a quite peculiar

vehemence. And there were times when we did want to stop. You could not dislike Desborough, whatever you might think of his habits. And his looks had some effect, too, for looks in a man do have an effect even upon men. Slight and well-made, active though not strong, he held his own pretty well in most of our athletic contests when sheer strength was not required —that is, when it suited him to do so. When he wished to read no power on earth would induce him to take part in even the most spirited of bear fights, and I remember one occasion, when the 39th Lancers dined with us, and we had, *vi et armis*, succeeded in tying nearly all of them together in one grand struggling mass of humanity, that he utterly refused to come to our assistance with regard to a fat captain who had hitherto eluded our most determined efforts. With all his faults, however, he gradually became very popular with us all except Harroch, who held him

in unaccountable aversion, and imperceptibly we became, I think, rather ashamed of bullying him, for with all his poetising and humbug he was not in any acceptation of the word a "muff," was always ready to do his brother officers a service, and preserved always a good temper which few of us could have kept under such trying circumstances. I can see his face now, with its sweet smile, the large, dark blue eyes and delicate features, the thoughtful brow and the clustering chestnut curls. Dear me! I wonder whether, if events had occurred differently, he would have been now a grumbling old half-pay buffer like me?

I often used to rally him while we were at Quereal on the coldness he showed to the attractions of the many lovely young creatures who would willingly have become his muffin, and driven with him in his sleigh; but he always turned the subject, if possible, and, if not possible, simply said that he did not care about that sort of thing.

"Not care about women!" I said, once.

"No," he replied (we were having a pipe in my room after a field-day), "not in the way you mean. I don't like the idea of dribbling away the gold there is in loving a woman in the small change of muffinism."

"But, my dear fellow," I remember answering, "it's the best fun going. No one expects you to be in earnest; but you must admit it is jolly to drive home from a good dinner with the sleigh bells ringing in the frosty air, under a grand moon, a splendid cigar in your mouth, and a lovely girl looking into your eyes, and squeezing the hand that hasn't got hold of the reins."

"I *can* imagine it, but I'm not quite—I mean I take things rather more seriously than you do. I can't draw the line so exactly, you see."

And he laughed merrily, and I laughed too; and I forget the rest of our conversation, except that I failed as usual in inducing

him to take to himself a young companion of the other sex for the winter.

I really wished him to do so for his own sake and also for the credit of the regiment, as we had already monopolised nearly all the prettiest girls of Quereal, much to the disgust of the other regiments there. Besides, I was getting tired of being perpetually pestered with inquiries about our woman-hating cornet, as they called him; and my muffin, a young lady who became engaged regularly a few months after a new regiment marched in, and was as regularly thrown over again when it marched out, was one of the most inquisitive of the inquirers.

"He is so beautiful," she would say, as I drove her along.

"Oh, bother that! We needn't waste the afternoon talking of Desborough."

"No; but I wonder *why* he won't come to the party. *Do* try to make him, dear Captain Brown."

And at last I did make him. He came to one of our Club drives, with a brother cornet in his sleigh, and certainly not one of us—not even Harroch, who was decidedly our "beauty man"—could hold a candle to him. Every woman there fell in love with him on the spot, and I don't wonder at it. He was so young, so handsome, so modest, so clever, so amusing. Having had so much to do with his being there, I felt quite proud of him, and was as pleased as if I had been the life and soul of the party myself.

Harroch had driven down a girl who had very lately come to Quereal from the States; dark, with enormous eyes, and the very best type of American beauty altogether. But, after looking at her eyes, you somehow forgot the rest of her face, perfect as it was, as you can see nothing of the sky after glancing inadvertently into the sun. Harroch was very proud of her, and hinted darkly that she was the only child of her

father, a millionaire in New York city; while we who had eyes could easily see that there was very little interposing between our gallant Captain and the possession, if he so pleased, of those millions, *plus* the lady.

That is, until after this party. And that brings me at last to the *bonâ fide* commencement of my story, all this having been only preliminary.

II.

I AM not a very observant person—at any rate, I was not in those days—and at this especial dinner much of my time was taken up in attending to the wants of my muffin, who was rather *exigeante,* as a lady of such vast experience in lovers was certain to be; but even that night I thought I observed once or twice that Miss Hortense McCullum's eyes were turned on Desborough, even while Harroch was making his prettiest

speeches to her; and that Desborough seemed always to look at her when joining in the general conversation at our end of the table.

After the dinner was over I found myself near her.

"Who was that opposite me, Captain Brown?" she asked, with that little half saucy, half imperious manner which added so much to her charms.

"Desborough, one of our cornets," I answered; wishing I was Harroch, and that my muffin was—at home.

"Bring him to me."

But he would not be brought. He was out in the yard seeing his horses put to, and nothing would induce him to come in again.

"But you must wish to be introduced to her. I saw you admired her."

"Yes, I did. It is best to leave off with an appetite," he said, arranging his leaders' reins. "Besides, Captain Harroch—"

At that moment Harroch came up to us, and Desborough stopped abruptly.

"Are you going away, young un?" he asked.

"Yes," said Desborough; "I must begin these things with small doses at first. Quiet, mare!"

I followed Harroch back into the room where, the table and chairs being removed, we were going to dance; and could not help overhearing Miss McCullum's first speech to him as he entered and went up to her.

"Well, where is he?"

I did not hear the Captain's answer, but I did observe that the ornament of our regiment was not at all in his usual form that night; and, had it been possible for a Cornet to think such a thing of such a man, I should have said that he was suffering from severe snubbing on the part of his lady-love. I know that he drove home alone, as she insisted on occupying a vacant

seat in old Colonel Dearlove's big sleigh beside his wife; and, in the ante-room, when we got home, Harroch gave vent to such awful sarcasms about women that I remember dreaming that night that my muffin was sitting on my chest, extracting, with a red-hot pair of tongs, my heart from its natural position, and placing it in small pieces upon the fire.

But this may have been as much owing to the grilled bones and anchovy toast with which we finished up as to the Captain's caustic remarks.

For about a fortnight after this Desborough refused to come to any of our drives or pic-nics, or parties, till one night, just as I was tying my tie for the occasion of a grand ball at a Mrs. Swinehead's—where, by the by, Hortense McCullum was staying—he burst into my room in his impulsive way, and, throwing himself into a chair, exclaimed—

"Tom, do you think I could get an invitation to this thing?"

"Why, you refused, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I want to go."

"Well, old chap, you see——"

"Can't you ask Mrs. Swinehead? I'll send my servant, and he can bring a message here."

Of course I promised, and equally of course good-natured old Mrs. Swinehead was delighted, and the message was at once despatched to barracks.

I happened to be dancing with Hortense when Desborough came into the room, and was just telling her, as a good joke, how our misogynist cornet had suddenly recanted, when I felt her start violently, and saw her turn very pale. At that moment Harroch came up, and, the dance ending, took her off to the conservatory or somewhere.

Desborough, after all the trouble I had taken to get him there, did not seem to enjoy himself much after all. He stood about in

doorways, and altogether behaved in a manner quite unfitting one of Her Majesty's 30th, for we prided ourselves on our demeanour in Society.

Towards the end of the ball I met him, lingering outside the supper-room, where I saw Harroch making great running with the New York beauty.

"I never saw such a fellow," I said, rather crossly. "You were so keen to come, and you go about when you are here like a mute at a funeral."

He did not seem to hear me, but was apparently absorbed in watching the white shoulders of Miss McCullum and the broad back of our handsome captain as he leant over her and attended to her wants.

"Why don't you get introduced to her?" I asked, following his eyes.

He turned away with an exclamation I did not hear, and I was caught by a hungry chaperon, whom I had been evading for the last hour. When I at length escaped from

the supper-table Desborough had gone, and I heard rumours of all sorts concerning Harroch and the heiress.

These rumours were confirmed later that night, when he announced to a select circle over our parting glass that he had proposed to and been accepted by that lady.

Next day we were all rather surprised by Desborough applying for leave to go to the backwoods, as no one thought he cared to slay a moose; but of course the topic of Harroch's engagement dwarfed everything else.

I saw the boy off, and thought as I shook hands with him that he looked ill and melancholy; but at that time of life we put everything down to a glass too much overnight. Young cynics that we were, we traced all feeling to the stomach.

III.

It was some weeks before Desborough came

back from his so-called sporting expedition. As he brought back no head of moose, or tales of having nearly killed one, and could not even boast of the caribous which had fallen victim to his prowess, he was of course unmercifully chaffed by the young ones on his want of success. Harroch was especially hard on him, and gave vent to much cutting sarcasm as to the uses of "muffs," which would have angered most men. Desborough, however, took it all very calmly, and lived a quieter and more retired life than ever with his books; generally disappearing from the ante-room soon after mess, unless, as was not unfrequent, a select party of boisterous spirits was told off to "draw" him and bring him down *nolens volens* into our sweet society again.

"It is really too bad," I said to him one day, when I had persuaded him to come for a drive with me in my sleigh. "They bother you more than ever now. I shall see what I can do to stop it."

"No, don't, Tom!" he cried; "leave them alone. It amuses them, and it don't hurt me much. Besides, they must soon get tired of it. I suppose it is to a certain extent my fault. I have no right to live a different sort of life from the others. But if I prefer my own ways and the bullying to their ways *minus* the bullying, that is my own affair."

"But I am not sure it is all good-natured," I said, catching my whip artistically. "Harroch seems always to——"

"Harroch don't like me. I scarcely know why, except that I don't like him, equally without cause. It is what you may call 'natural dis-affinity,' I suppose. By the way, I suppose he will be married soon?"

I thought Desborough's voice shook just a little as he asked this question; but his face was quite calm when I looked curiously into it.

"Yes, I suppose so. It's a capital match for both, isn't it?"

"You mean that she has money, and that he will be a peer, and want it."

"Well, that's the sort of idea. Not that he will be badly off, but I have no doubt the money will be useful in case the old lord lives much longer, for Harroch's an extravagant fellow."

"Do you think she cares for him?"

"God bless my soul! how can I tell? Yes, I should say she did, though; I saw her look at him the other night in a very—very luscious sort of way."

Desborough shuddered.

"What horrible expressions you use, Tom! Luscious! Her eyes are unlike anything I ever saw before. Luscious!"

"Well, dreamy—longing; there was something odd in the look, I know. My muffin couldn't do it if she tried for a month."

"Oh, don't mix Hortense McCullum up with your muffin!" he cried, impatiently.

"Why not?" I asked, with some dignity,

for one's muffin is always a tender point. "How is she so much better?—a low-born Yankee girl with a vulgar father, who has made some dollars, probably by robbery, and who is willing to sell her to a future lord. I really don't see——"

"You don't see, my dear fellow," said he, with the calm smile that always made Harroch so angry, "that, whatever her parentage and belongings, she is something different from the little women who make eyes at us here? Oh, yes, you do see; you have sufficient observation for that, Tom!"

And, as I *did* see it, I thought it better to say no more, even though my muffin had been depreciated.

We had not driven much farther before we saw that there was something occurring in a wood before us; and before long we came up to what was not a very extraordinary occurrence in those days—namely, a hand-to-hand encounter for the right of way between a gentleman and a lumber-man,

who objected to draw his lumbering vehicle aside for the passage of the elegant equipage of his rival.

It was Jack Holywell of the 114th, with a heart of oak, but a meagre frame, who was doing battle with a very large and powerful man. In his sleigh, and looking very frightened, was his muffin, a very pretty girl with golden hair, awaiting the termination of the combat with much natural anxiety, for Jack's chance seemed small, and what would happen then?

She turned to us with heartfelt gratitude as we came up, and at that identical moment the lumber-man put in a slogging blow with his right, and the 114th man measured his length on the snow.

"Now just draw that sleigh off," said the man, triumphantly insolent, to the poor little muffin.

"Stop a bit," said Desborough, very politely; "stop a bit, sir! I admit that by

the rules of the road here you have a right to keep the centre of the track as far as that sleigh is concerned; but here is another. Do you intend to pull off for us?"

"D—— a bit!" said the man, surveying Desborough's slight frame with a sneer. "Not for you, my fine fellow!"

"Oh, bother it!" said I, who was averse to needless trouble, "let the brute go past."

"Certainly not, Tom," answered my companion, with decision. "Now, shall you fight him, or I?"

"Draw lots," I suggested.

"No; we'll give him the choice. Which would you prefer to fight, my friend?"

"Come down, you little beggar, and I'll teach you manners!" said the man, irritated by Desborough's mocking tone.

"You see, he chooses me. Don't be alarmed, Miss Jones; Jack 'll be all right in a moment—he's only knocked rather silly,

and I'll be as quick as possible;" and, divesting himself of his coat and waistcoat, he stepped down into the snow.

The combat was for some time very undecided. Desborough had had a few lessons in boxing, and managed to avoid most of the other's furious blows; but whenever he did get one it did execution, and his face was covered with blood, and one of his eyes showed an extreme desire to close itself up, before he contrived to get in a sufficient number of scientific taps upon the lumberman's face to make that worthy think that even the right of way may be too dearly purchased, and, lowering his brawny arms, to cry for peace. At this moment, from the opposite direction from which we had come, who should drive up in a carriole but Mrs. Swinehead and her guest, Miss Hortense McCullum. They were just in time to see our victorious finale; and the young lady, who had jumped out of her sleigh,

was introduced by us to the hero of the episode, as he was putting on his coat and trying, as he said, to look like a peaceable Christian again.

And, as I performed the ceremony, I heard him mutter under his breath a word that sounded like "Kismet."

"How well he fought!" Miss McCullum said to me in a low tone, while Desborough was greeting Mrs. Swinehead. "I had no idea—I mean Captain Harroch told me——"

And then she blushed and said no more; and blushed again when Desborough turned to her and looked, as I told him afterwards, prettier than ever.

Harroch pooh-poohed the whole thing very much when he heard of it, and vowed that anyone could thrash a lumber-man, even with one arm tied up. When he proposed to draw Desborough, however, he found no seconder, it being the general idea

that the studious cornet had earned, for that night at least, the right to do as he liked.

IV.

I DON'T know how it was, but gradually I became, after this episode, very friendly with Miss McCullum, and scarcely a day passed but I went up to old Mrs. Swinehead's house, and had a chat with the American beauty. And the more I saw of her the more I liked her. She was of Southern extraction, and had none of the twang which sometimes so spoils our lovely cousins from over the sea; and there was a subdued sadness about her which was very touching and alluring. She was so soft and gentle that you could not help feeling a wish to protect her, or do something great for her sake; and yet she had a latent strength in her character, a power of flashing in her

eyes, that won your respect and ensured your abstention from any of those little doubtful jokes which so mightily amused some of the fair ladies who were good enough to flirt with the garrison.

Mrs. Swinehead was a vulgar old woman enough, but *chaperons* are not permitted to be in the way in the City of Quereal, and, if by accident I ever found the old lady in her own drawing-room, she always scuttled out with almost ludicrous haste.

"They make life pleasant for the young on this side of the Atlantic," Miss McCullum said to me one day; "but I'm not sure it's a good plan; one ought to have the best part to look forward to."

I never was with her long before we drifted into converse on the same subject—Desborough. She brought him in so cleverly that it often seemed as if I had done so; yet, much as I liked him, I was not quite

unselfish enough to voluntarily talk of him all the time I was within shot of Miss Hortense's eyes.

"So he is very poor?" she would say, leaning forward, and looking straight into my eyes with her earnest gaze.

"Yes."

"And very clever?"

"Oh! clever enough."

"And a poet?"

"I believe he writes rhymes."

"And very courageous?"

"I fancy we most of us would have tried at least to lick that lumber-man, Miss McCullum," I said, wishing I had not been so lazy that day.

She laughed.

"Oh! of course; but he licked one of you, and another one sat still."

"Holywell is not in the 30th, and—and—well, yes, I did sit still, because you see I wasn't wanted."

As I happen to be over six feet high,

and pretty strong for my size (at least, I was then), I did not think it necessary any more to vindicate my behaviour on that occasion; although I must own that I should have liked, in Hortense's company, to come again upon that lumber-man, or even a bigger one.

"Why doesn't he come and see me?"

"He has two black eyes."

"What does that matter? Has he a muffin?"

"Oh, dear, no! He says——"

"Well, what does he say?"

"That he won't waste the real article in the small change of muffinism."

"The real article!" she said, with a sigh, getting up and walking towards the window. "What does he know of that? How does he know there is such a thing? Oh, here is Captain Harroch! What a pretty tandem those ponies make, don't they, Captain Brown?"

I joined her at the window, and

saw Harroch, looking very handsome and smart, as he smiled up at her from his sleigh.

V.

THE winter was beginning to get old and shabby and be-draggled, as the winter in Canada does; the snow was losing its purity of white, and the sombre earth was beginning to re-appear through its fleecy covering; the reign of slush was commencing; our waterproof boots were powerless to keep out the cold oozing water; doubt was in every coachman's mind as to whether runners or wheels were the best means of progression—when the news came to us that old Mr. McCullum, merchant, of New York City, had failed to the tune of a great many thousand dollars. Harroch had gone to England, and we were speculating as to what effect this would have upon his court-

ship, when we heard that his grandfather had died, and that our Captain was now Lord Isleworth, with a large fortune. His papers went in immediately, but great was our astonishment to hear that he intended to come out again to Canada—"To say good-bye to the fellows, and for other reasons," he wrote to me. "Of course, I cannot go out in England now, being in mourning, and I should like to see Quereal again. Besides, as you know, I have a very important reason for coming over, so expect me to mess in a fortnight's time. I daresay you'll make me an honorary member."

We all said this was very nice of him, although I am sure I would have gone many Atlantic voyages to see Hortense's bright eyes; and it was generally agreed that he intended to carry out his intentions with regard to that young lady, and take her back to England as Lady Isleworth.

She had left Mrs. Swinehead's now, for her father had come to Quereal, bringing with him two sons, boys of twenty and seventeen; and they had all settled in a cottage about half a mile outside the town. A pretty cottage, though it must have seemed very small and comfortless after the New York Palace, or even the substantial house of old Mrs. Swinehead. I had only seen Miss McCullum once since the catastrophe—as I did not like to intrude on their trouble—and then she had completed the conquest of my heart (if any completion of that performance was possible) by her frank acceptance of the situation.

"My poor father is very much cut up," she said; "but he seems to get great consolation out of my engagement."

"You have heard from Harroch?" I asked.

"No," she said, rather nervously, twisting her handkerchief in her white fingers. "No, not since his grandfather died."

"He is coming over almost immediately."

She started.

"Immediately! How do you know?"

I showed her the part of his letter which I have transcribed here.

I had got into a habit of watching her mobile face—it was so very beautiful—and I thought I saw an expression on it now that was not joy. And yet we, in the anteroom, had all agreed that Harroch's fidelity was rather wonderful, and should fill the McCullum family with delight.

I met Desborough as I came away from the house, after being introduced to Mr. McCullum—a stern, hard-featured gentleman, who looked uncommonly angry with the world which had ill-treated him—and was astonished at the eagerness in his usually calm face.

In a couple of hours he came back to barracks and into my room to have a chat before mess.

"She is an angel," he remarked, after

sitting gloomily in my straw chair for some ten minutes, staring at the stove.

Of course I knew whom he meant.

"Yes, she bears it wonderfully, and the father don't look very sympathetic."

"An old scoundrel," burst out Desborough, jumping from his chair; "a swindling, grasping, mean, bankrupt blackguard—a man who should be drowned like a blind puppy."

"Hullo!" cried I. "Why, what has he done to you? Had you any shares in the Arkansas Tram Company, or the Minnesota Balloon Despatch Company, or the Submarine Parcels Delivery Company, or——"

"Don't be a fool, Tom. You know I have no money even to lose. If I had——" and he struck his hand on the table.

"You would——" I prompted.

"I shouldn't even then be a peer of the realm," said he, gloomily, sitting down again in his chair.

"Of course you heard about Harroch's coming back?" I asked, after another pause.

He nodded.

"And that he sticks to the thing."

"Sticks to the thing! What condescension! Do you think she isn't a million times too good—too——" But he interrupted himself, and soon after went to his room to dress for dinner.

VI.

It is not a habit of mine to listen to conversation not intended for me, but one day at the McCullums' cottage I could not help being the auditor of some words between Desborough and Hortense, which opened my eyes very wide indeed.

I had strolled into the little conservatory, and they had come in so suddenly, and he was so evidently just about to leave the house, that I could not come out

soon enough to save them the confusion of the knowledge that I knew their secret.

"Then you will marry him?" I heard our cornet say, in a low, fierce, unnatural voice.

"Yes," she said, also in a low tone.

"And you love me?"

"Oh! darling, do not torture me. Do you not see that I *must*—that my father——"

"He can only sell stocks and shares; he cannot sell flesh and blood."

"You should not speak so of him. He has toiled all his life for us, his children. He has sacrificed his time, his health, his pleasure for us. He is old, broken-down, ruined, and he asks a sacrifice of me—one for whom he has done so much. Is it all to be on his side? Are we to do nothing? Can I refuse?"

"You should refuse. Yes. This bargain

is wicked in the sight of God. Hortense, see here. I am a poor man, but I can work; I have brains, I have determination. Only say one word, and I will give up the regiment, and see whether I cannot hold my own with the money-getters. With your father's knowledge and my energy what could not be done? Hortense, you *cannot* do this thing!"

There was a pause, as if she were steadying her voice to reply, which she did with a mournful sweetness quite indescribable.

"My poor boy, you do not understand. I never meant you to know; but your words when we first knew of our misfortunes, your generous offer of all you had—oh! darling, I shall never forget that—forced my secret from me; and I cannot deny it now. I do love you. I shall always love you; it is a love that will make my life a long misery—but it is sweet, too! But you do not know my father; he is set upon this marriage; he

has—like many Americans—an exaggerated notion of British Lords; he thinks my being the wife of one will raise him somehow, and Captain Har— I mean Lord Isleworth—has been very generous in his offers. No, no, it is hard; as hard, darling, for me as for you; but it must be."

"It shall not be!" I heard Desborough exclaim, hoarse with passion; and then Mr. McCullum came in, and they all went out into the hall together, and then I escaped and went back to barracks with a heavy heart, pondering on the adage as to true love, and wondering why Providence should have made these two poor young persons fall in love with one another.

Harroch, now Isleworth, arrived by the boat he was expected by, and brought a magnificent present to add to our table plate, and made himself so agreeable that we all regretted more than ever that we had lost such an ornament to any regiment.

It was only the elder among us who had discovered how much of scheming selfishness there was hidden under his careless *bon-homie;* and selfishness, to which we are all subject, does not touch us very acutely in others, unless it happens to interfere with ourselves in some especial manner.

And as Harroch grew more popular, so Desborough went in the reverse direction. He shut himself up more than ever, only spoke when addressed, and that if possible in monosyllables, and avoided even me. Knowing his secret—though unable to tell him so and to sympathise—I was not surprised at his conduct; but the other cornets were much incensed at his want of geniality, and were ripe for any mischief which might be proposed in the way of Desborough-baiting, when, on one unlucky night, the 170th Fusiliers, noted for their drinking and bear-fighting qualities, came to dine with us, in return for a dinner they had

lately given to us, when the evening had been ended by a moonlight sleigh race, in which one arm, one collar-bone, and any quantity of ribs had been broken.

VII.

"LIEUTENANT ARTHUR DESBOROUGH," said Isleworth, when the cloth had been removed, in tones of mock solemnity, "the pleasure of a glass of wine with you."

There was no response.

"Desborough," said the Colonel, with some asperity in his tone, "did you not hear? Isleworth wishes to take wine with you."

Desborough bowed slightly, and just touched his glass with his lips, while several of the youngsters, who had guessed—heaven knows how!—at his feelings with regard to Hortense McCullum, nudged each other.

"Look at the jealous little beggar!"

Almost immediately after we had adjourned to the ante-room and cigars were being lit, he disappeared, and in the confusion of tongues—the 170th being a peculiarly noisy lot—he was for some time not missed. We played at different games—Van John, Poker, and others—until the seniors went to bed, it being understood that a certain amount of restraint was to be exercised until then. But after that the fun grew fast and furious; rough and tumble and burnt punch was the order of the day, and every kind of wild suggestion for noise and excitement was being made when, in a pause in the disorder, I heard a voice, which I thought was Isleworth's, say, "Why not draw Desborough?" There was a shout of assent, and a group of semi-drunken young gentlemen straightway raced upstairs for his room.

I did not follow them, and my heart was heavy as I thought of the poor boy with his sorrow and his loss being obliged to endure

this rough horseplay. He was only half-dressed, I noticed, as he was carried in triumph down to the ante-room and held tight by two athletic cornets while a council of war was held.

Numerous suggestions for the bestowal of his person were made, during which he stood silent, his anger only showing itself in his large dark eyes.

"Let's give him a swim in the river, it'll wake him up," said the same voice as before.

Desborough darted a glance in its direction, but said nothing.

"To the river! to the river!" was the cry; and a general rush—the prisoner being in the midst—was made down the *place* or square, at the bottom of which ran the broad, dark St. Lewis; bits of ice floating down it here and there, the last witnesses to the past winter.

I and one or two others ventured to

expostulate, but the majority were half angry and half drunk—a dangerous state of mind when violence is on foot.

"We won't do it if he says he's afraid," said Isleworth, standing close to him, with a sarcastic smile.

Desborough looked him in the face—a look I shall never forget, nor, I think, will the noble Lord—such defiance and such contempt were blended in it—but answered nothing.

It was this silent, contemptuous braving of them that roused their anger; had he struggled or laughed, the joke would have ended here; but the wine was in and the wit was out. I did all I could—yes, I conscientiously affirm I did all I could—to stop the thing; but I was swept aside, and in another moment Desborough was flung into the water.

For a minute the rioters seemed a little ashamed of themselves, as he swam away

into the darkness; but this is not a state of mind to be encouraged, and feeling the want of sustenance after their exploit, they returned for broiled bones and more liquor, never doubting but that the victim of the joke would soon re-appear, safe, if cold and dripping.

VIII.

Kept awake by her thoughts, Hortense McCullum sat by her window and watched the rising of the sun, the beginning to her of a new day of self-repression and sorrow. She had made up her mind, and would not swerve a hair'sbreadth from her determination; but it was very bitter.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" she cried to the cold sky, "if you knew what it is to do my duty! But God will help me."

The angry river dashes past, close to the cottage walls, and seems to bear away with it the hope of her maidenhood, the romance

of her life. She leans her fair forehead against the window-pane, and a sob bursts from her.

Stay! What is that battling with the water, not fifty yards from the shore? It is a man, struggling, drowning! Yes, she sees his arms thrown up. She flings open the window, and she hears a cry. It is her own name! "Hortense!" is wafted across the waters.

She flies out of the room, and cries loudly for assistance. A servant is roused, and she dashes down, fumbling, in her excitement, with the door-fastenings, and losing a precious moment. To the river-side! Nothing!

"But I saw it!—a man—close in! Join hands! It was coming in shore! It may not be too late."

A couple of fishermen come running up, and they confirm the statement—there was a drowning man close by a few moments ago. Others come up; a boat is launched.

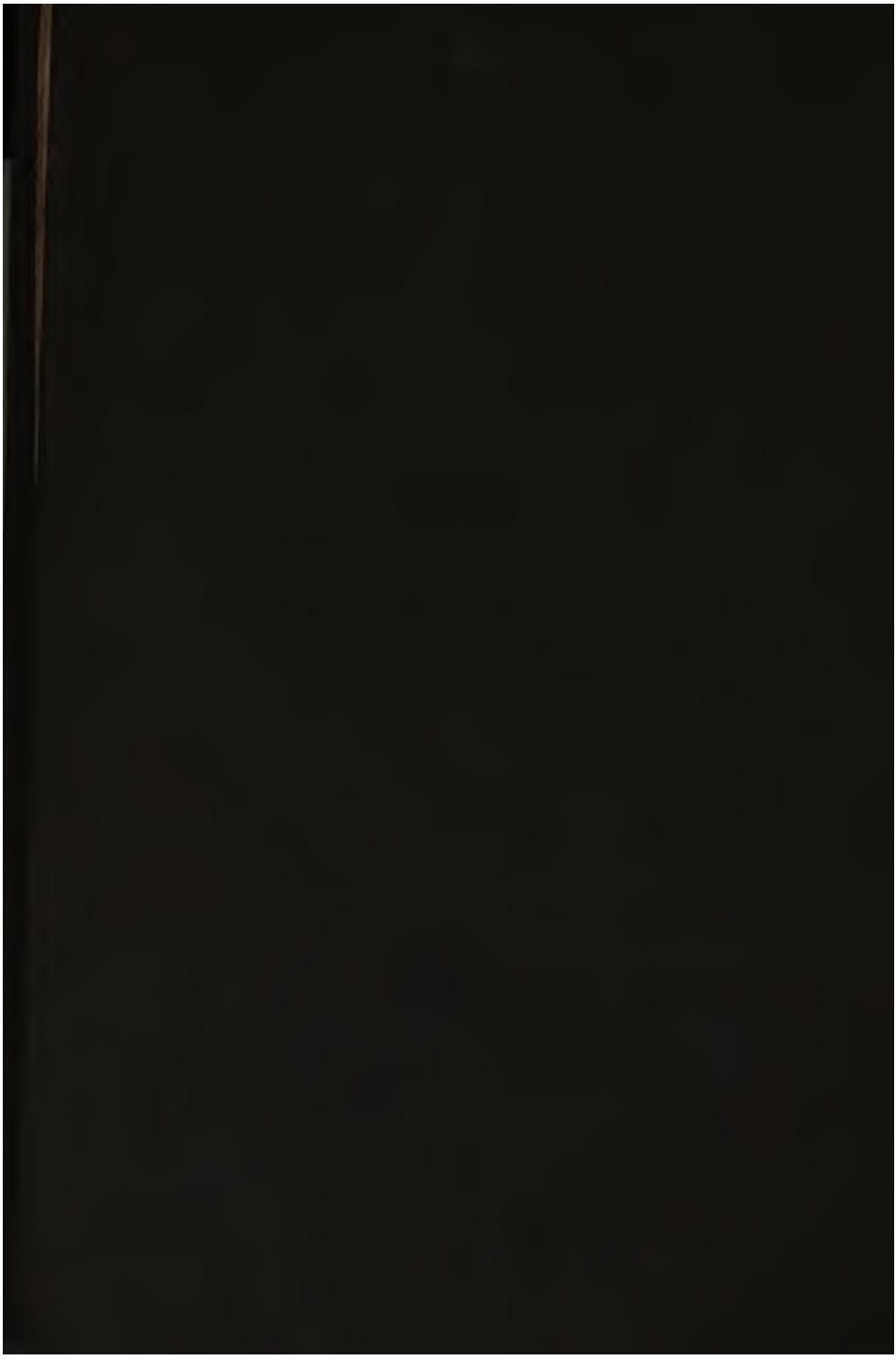
There is confusion, but some method, and their efforts are rewarded. An arm shows above the water for a second—they are too late to grasp it, and wait anxiously. It comes up again, this time to be seized by two pair of strong hands, and Desborough, inanimate and dying, is dragged into the boat.

Ah, too late now, Hortense, for all your love, for your warmest caresses! Not a word, only one sigh. Does he know that his last wish, that his determination when they threw him into the cruel river, is attained, and that he has come to die at the feet of his love? There he does die, and dead he is carried to the cottage and laid upon her bed (for so she will have it), beautiful and still, but only clay for all that.

IX.

THEY said it was his own fault; why did he

not swim to land, instead of three miles down the river in such icy water? They said she was demented to refuse such a rich lord, just because he had unfortunately been mixed up in the bear fight. They said she caught cold that night, and that it settled on her lungs, and eventually carried her off; but I think that he killed himself for love of her, and that she died of a broken heart.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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